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TRAITS OF TRAVEL;

OR,

TALES OF MEN AND CITIES.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "HIGH-WAYS AND BY-WAYS."

by Grattan.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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BELGIAN SKETCHES.

INTRODUCTION.

The following papers are no more than they profess to be, *sketches* of a country which I have not known long enough to know it well. I have, however, seen sufficient of the world to know the fallacy of first impressions; and I am, therefore, cautious in forming opinions of nations, except on points of mere external physiognomy. In individuals, even *these* may be made subservient to their designs on the observer; but a whole population cannot change its face for the purpose of deception. There are certain striking features peculiar to a people. When *they* appear

what they are not, the deception is engendered in the brain of the observer. He sees things under influences purely personal; he is affected by pre-conceived opinions; and measures the objects he looks at, by the scale of his own qualifications, not by their qualities. No wonder, then, that many learned and estimable authors are mistaken on self-evident points, and thousands of travellers after them, who love to take things for granted, and look at them with other eyes than their own. The generality of writers of "visits" and "tours," following in single file, like Indian warriors on a hostile expedition, know nothing to the right or left of the path, each being only mindful to tread in his predecessor's track. They thus form their notions of character from sources where it does not in reality exist; they mistake decomposed materials for masses of solid combination; and believe that they depict a nation when they describe its metropolis.

Another mistake of most authors appears to

me their readiness to notice faults of character, in preference to merits. They slide over the smooth sward of national virtues, without remark; but cannot see a pebble on their path without making it a stumbling block. They prefer what is singular and striking to that which is general and passive. They find the former in national *defects*, for these, like individual failings, stand out in full relief. They are the "beaked promontories," against which most voyagers are afraid of striking, which they describe with a shudder, and fly from without examining. But each jutting rock is furnished with its beacon, not only to warn the stranger of peril, but to light him to safety in many a verdant recess. In the French revolution, for instance, the most marked objects, view it from what point we will, are its crimes. But if we boldly enter on the scenes of their commission, how much redeeming softness, what a fund of downy virtues may the mind repose on, to save us from misanthropy, and teach us to be men.

But just allowance is rarely made for the faults of nations. We forget that they often spring from the elements of purity — that a primitive virtue may run into excess—that a spark of brightness may be blown into a conflagration. Alarmed and offended at the glare, we would extinguish it entirely, and leave ourselves in the dark. Is it not better to soften the light, than smother it? — to shade our eyes, than completely close them? — to leave ourselves at least the means of seeing our way through the labyrinth in which we are self-involved?

To come at the real, distinctive character of a nation is a matter of great difficulty: it is formed of such varying shades—such infinite blendings — so cameleon-like in the shifting accidents of its moral atmosphere! It is easy to talk of fixed principles, and unbending distinctions. Where are they to be found? In individuals? Shew me the mind that *may* not be warped by circumstances—the nation that

must not be changed by events. Are the English people what they were before the reformation—the French the same as before the revolution? And what may not Greece become again, in the splendid renovation that awaits her? or Ireland, in the gradual removal of that mass of misrule, which still covers her prostrate energies?

But this, perhaps, is "wandering from the record." I have now to deal with Belgium; and to no country in Europe do most of the foregoing observations apply more strongly. It is, I think, every way undervalued by travellers. An inconceivable ignorance as to its capabilities, even to its very boundaries,* is observable in many works upon it. Writers of *romance* can find no matter for their pens, and seem, with one truly brilliant exception,† to abandon it in despair. I nevertheless conceive it to be rich

* *Les Fastes Universels* state the geographical divisions of Belgium to be precisely what they were under the Austrian dominion.

† Quentin Durward.

in subjects of great variety; and see in its many incongruous peculiarities abundant materials for illustration. I by no means attempt to say that I have been able to avail myself of them. They are objects that catch the eye of the traveller, but which the hand of the sojourner alone can reach.

I admit that there is much that is repulsive at first sight: many faults that shew nothing evidently redeeming. A Spaniard throws an air of chivalry into his fanaticism—the bigotry of a Belgian is as dull as it is gross. An Irishman "disguised" amuses by his humour; the bright spirit of his whisky evaporates in fun or fighting. The drunken Belgian is besotted as well as brutified—he is but a fermented beer-barrel. The avarice of a Dutchman is based on calculation—that of a Belgian on cunning. The petty cheateries on the road, the impositions of the swarm of blood-suckers that fastens on the traveller, are the plodding realities of roguery. A picturesque highwayman, or senti-

mental pickpocket, never appears. Elsewhere one is cheated sometimes; but *here* one never escapes. I met with more exactions, I lost more articles of dress, in a few months rambling through Belgium, than in twice as many years of travelling and residence in France. Yet, after all, I maintain that there is much of individual and natural good to be found, by those who will take the pains to seek it—and I (like my countryman) think "the trouble a pleasure."

The Belgians are reproached by strangers with having *no* national character. Their native writers labour hard to prove that they have two or three. I acknowledge myself to believe that they neither have, nor can yet have, any so marked and settled, as to be considered peculiarly their own. Centuries of subjection to various European powers, all widely opposite to each other in manners and customs, have left among the Belgians evident traces of inconsistency, modified by time, and by one brief and brilliant era of liberty. The taint of each

separate tyranny blends with the bright colouring of freedom; and their faults combine with courage, humanity, industry, and pride.

The Netherlands form at this moment a new country; and their various provinces are, for the first time, an acknowledged, independent, *uncontested* state. In this aspect they become a subject of peculiar interest. They possess moral varieties proportioned to their chequered scenery. They know their own limits, their masters, and their laws. Under the inspiring influences of a constitutional government, a liberal king, and a gallant heir-apparent, they take a present stand, and promise a continued place among "the nations;" and they inspire me at once with interest and inclination to sketch the outlines of a portrait which some abler hand will, in time, fill up and finish.

THE FRONTIER.

THE FRONTIER.

The view from Mount Cassel, on the northern frontier of France, is, I believe, unequalled in its kind. Prospects of infinitely greater variety, and consequently of superior beauty, abound even in France. England possesses landscapes, seen from many an eminence, of more isolated richness. Mountain scenery, in all countries, leave it no chance of comparison in point of actual extent—but it is nevertheless unrivalled.

The eye, taking in a circuit of about twenty miles depth from the point of observation, but

particularly directed towards Belgium, reposes on a mass of vegetable wealth, a profusion of deep green, which might rival the savannahs on "Susquehanna's Side." This luxury of foliage marks the scene as one of nature's most fertile districts; and man has not been less prodigal in proofs of his preference. Upwards of thirty towns, and thrice as many villages, distinguishable from the eminence, shew that civilization has long been established in these verdant plains; and we may fancy the immense population that swarms over the teeming soil.

It is this combination which forms the extraordinary charm of the prospect. It is the vastness and the wealth united—the evidences of fertility and industry—the alliance between nature and art. But almost all that constitutes *beauty* in a landscape is wanting. There are trees and spires—that is all; and these in such monotonous profusion that they soon fatigue the sight. There are no rivers; not a hill except the one we stand on; no visible ruins; no contrast, in short,

no *variety*—and, without *that*, what view is beautiful?

No sooner is the first burst of astonishment gone by—and such is certainly excited—than we begin to find fault with the scene; and what caused such wholesale surprise we instantly depreciate in detail. In the broad plain of verdure we see only what is "flat and stale," though we cannot in conscience add "unprofitable." The thin veil of vapour, which seemed a fine-spun tissue, covering the fertile soil, now takes the aspect of an unwholesome mist, engendering disease, and shrouding death. The spires which rise up around seem emblems of an insolent religion, lording it over the land. Nothing strikes us as romantic, wild, or picturesque; and we prepare to plunge into this low region, already tired of its monotony, and half suffocated by anticipation in its marshy atmosphere.

It matters little to the reader *when* it was that I stood on Mount Cassel, or whether it was on my first visit or my last that the sensations arose,

which I, with the license of authorship, have supposed common to all; or whether my feelings received their colouring *from*, or imparted it *to* the scene. But however different persons might be variously affected by its individual peculiarities, there is one feeling which I am sure is general, not confined to the immediate spot which I describe, but arising on every view taken of a rich and pastoral landscape in solitude—and more strongly, in proportion as the weather is mild and the atmosphere serene. I mean the deep melancholy which steals upon the mind while contemplating a prospect unanimated by human beings, and unassociated with feelings of local attachment. All its beauties seem steeped in pensiveness, and an undefinable heaviness weighs the spirit down. Yet we do not the less enjoy the scene. Its charms are felt, perhaps, the deeper, from the accompanying sadness in which they seem involved. The brighter the sun, the more powerful these sensations. If the distant hum of villages, or the chiming of church

bells, come swelling on the air, they but add to the depression; and it is then the mind is most prone to long for those distant objects of affection, far beyond its covetous grasp, and who alone are wanting to turn the oppressive scene into a paradise of joy.

It was a glorious morning in midsummer, when I descended the paved causeway that winds round the hill; and, soon losing sight of the suburbs of Cassel, I was entering one of the passes of the vast and populous plain, which did not contain a thing to excite my interest, nor a being whom I knew. As I had no particular object but *to break new ground*, I cared not whether I turned to the right or the left; and unfurnished with itinerary, map, or guide, it was totally by chance that I took the road to Poperingues, the nearest town within the Belgic frontier.

Approaching the confines of a new country, one naturally becomes watchful and anxious for the distinctive marks which are to tell you that

you have quitted the old. We expect, at least, to find in the natives the proud consciousness of a line of demarcation, on one side of which they may stamp the imprint of their home-born attachment, and on the other, if needs be, fix their foot in prompt invasion of the *foreigner*. Sound policy in governments would surely encourage a separate *feeling*, although the difference were as unreal as the imaginary line that divides the globe. For national *prejudices* are not more odious than national *distinctions* are wise. People divided from each other, by a sea, a river, a chain of mountains, or even a *rivulet*, as the Spanish and Portuguese, are totally distinct in character and habits, because they can point out their boundary; and, fancying some magic in the visible limit, attribute to the soil or the climate (which are the very same) results that arise from opposing institutions, founded on the feeling of a separate independence. Their pride is thus blended with the love of country; while hatred and contempt of the neighbour that *is*

the rival, and *may* become the foe, seem the natural consequence—the dross in which the ore is enveloped. To shake off the one and preserve the other, to foster a generous rivalry and discourage a brute enmity, should be the true aim of civilization, and the great object of good government. But to give a people these feelings, in relation to their neighbours and themselves, a marked and evident boundary between them seems essential. Napoleon maintained that the Rhine was the natural limit of France. It, or some other as decided, most certainly is, in the point of view in which I consider the question. But the mockery of a separation, which exists between the Netherlands and France, is wholly destructive of the feelings I advocate, and actually blends the natives so completely together, that the very notion of a *frontier* seems absurd.

Trudging along the sandy defile which leads from Cassel to Poperingues, I vainly inquired for the frontier line. The former town having

been, until the last division of this part of Europe, included in Flanders, although it is now in France, Flemish is spoken there exclusively, except for the accommodation of strangers. As I advanced into the country, the peasants understood no other language, and I was hard set to work my way, with the scanty knowledge I possessed. Not one of those I questioned was able to ascertain or describe the object I asked after. Some gave me to understand that *they* did not understand *me*. Others told me I was still in Frsnce—*but* that, if I continued my journey, I should infallibly reach Belgium. One man explained the frontier to be a narrow drain, cut in the soil *somewhere thereabouts;* but as to the exact spot, *that* I could not divine.

I at length gave up the point, and went forwards, through fertile tracks of what looked, notwithstanding its high state of cultivation, like reclaimed swamp, which sent up teeming crops of corn, flax, and tobacco, while hop plantations were thickly scattered around. The

whole scene was rich, to exuberance. It was utterly cloying. It was "a land of honey," in which one's feet seemed to stick. The air was damp and clammy. The heavy smell of the flax, as it lay soaking in the stagnant pools, brought with it the worst associations of ill health. Ague and fever seemed abroad—and I hurried on, as if escaping from a lazar-house.

NATIONAL TRAITS.

NATIONAL TRAITS.

While I thus trudged on, oppressed with heat and that suffocation of feelings which I attempted to describe in my last sketch, I found a very important, though rather common-place, sensation stealing on me, in the guise of a downright fit of hunger. A house opportunely presented itself at the road side, with a broad announcement that there was no sacredness in it; but that all comers might, at all times, violate its sanctuary. A smartly painted board, fixed over the door, spoke thus plainly—

"HIER VERKOOPT MEN DRANKEN
"EN LOGIERT MEN TE VOET ENTE PEERD."*

"If," thought I, "the *lodging* be as neat as the *board*, a weary traveller may be well off in this hut: but who would be, of all callings on earth, a publican!—himself the slave of every passer by, while the very *penetralia* of his home is common to the commonest fellow who shakes the dust off his shoes over the threshold?"

"Give me a glass of beer!" said I, in lordly illustration of my moralizing, and in very good Flemish, although it was but plain English.

"Ya, Mynheer," said a clumsy wench, giving me the liquor.

"Brooed!" said I.

"Ya, Mynheer."

"Booter!"

"Ya, Mynheer;" — and she accordingly placed before me a lump of salt butter, and a *hoop* of coarse bread, which might have been

* Liquor sold here,
And lodging for man and beast.

used as a Brobdignagian wedding-ring, and served for separate maintenance afterwards. I got through my repast, which was eked out by a piece of abominable Dutch cheese, as quickly as possible, for I was thoroughly tired of my company—four or five boorish fellows, every man with a pipe in one corner of his mouth, and a huge glass of beer in constant application for admission at the other; while from between both issued a stream of smoke, and a stream of words (quite as vapoury, I dare say) in a jargon most odiously inimitable.

I was glad to be out on the road again, in all the noxious smells of soaking flax, the vapours of the stagnant pools, which surround every house—reservoirs of ready-made disease—and the monotony of poplar and willow, more sad, I thought, than cypress or yew.

I was almost inclined to face about, retrace my steps, and return into France; but still, being averse to retreating, as well as to judging by first appearances, I mechanically went for-

ward, debating the matter in my mind. As I proceeded in the deep clay of the road which led to Poperingue, through large plantations of hops, which abound in this country, every step seemed to lead me into a deeper solitude. I saw no habitation, nor people, nor cattle—nothing but hops; and I gradually got into that dizzy sort of speculative mood which so often steals on us in solitude like this. Waking visions began to rise upon me; but they were interrupted by the distant crack of a whip. This simple sound brought me back into the world, and it seemed to re-people the unsocial district through which I waded. The oft-repeated and increasing signal announced the approach of some one; but I vainly listened over the unpaved road, for the sound of wheels, the natural accompaniment to the crack! crack! which echoed through the hop-poles.

Something more cheerful came instead—the cadences of a man's voice, singing a joyous air,

in excellent tone and tune. I longed for the companionship of the minstrel, be he who or what he might, even before I saw him. He sent his vocal introduction before him, as ordinary people send a letter, or kings expedite their portrait; and I only hoped that the recommendation of my coming acquaintance spoke more honestly than the majority of those I have just alluded to.

The joyous vocalist at length came in view, round a turning in the narrow road on which we both journeyed, in the person of a cabriolet-driver; and he appeared in all the honours of his station, seated in a vehicle of the most clumsy construction, old, crazy, and weather-beaten, with a month's accumulation of mud and dust encrusted on all parts. The horse, that was yoked to it with a mixed arrangement of rope and leather, was quite in keeping. He was blind of one eye, and lame of *all* legs; bare, bony, innocent of the curry-comb or brush, and, apparently, free from all other kind of vice.

The driver himself was a whip-in-hand discrepancy to his establishment. He was perfectly out of place, yet he sat and looked quite at his ease—a true man of the world. He was an uncommonly good-looking fellow, somewhere on the frontiers of thirty, (which are at about that age as difficult to define as those of Belgium itself,) of a rakish, devil-may-care aspect and air, flashily dressed in an open vest, which was as well covered with silk frogs, as though it had been a half-pay militia lieutenant's. A rainbow-coloured silk handkerchief was loosely slung round his neck, and a blue cloth cap, with a tassel hanging from the top, reclined on one side of his curly head.

I may here observe that these cabriolet-drivers are a race of bipeds very much distinct from all others. The species of carriage that they form a part and parcel of, is most abounding all through Belgium, infinitely more so than in France; for there we see established on almost every road, between even the very small towns,

some public conveyance that starts at a fixed hour, some *patache*, or *charabane*, or the like, which gives passengers periodical opportunities of being shaken to a jelly, and jolted black and blue. But Belgium is greatly deficient in that way; every village inn, and almost every road-side drinking-house, possesses, instead, its one cabriolet or more, which conveys the single traveller at an easier rate, but on much harder terms. In fact, there is no fixed price for time or distance. All is optional with the innkeeper. But he is never capriciously *reasonable;* and heaven help the *voyageurs* who have no judge but his conscience! It never hears appeals.

As for the drivers, they are in general very odd fellows. They are the best informed men in the country, for twenty miles round, for that is about the extent of their driving, and consequently of their knowledge. But ask them a question as to aught beyond that, and they "don't know that country." From the town they live in, to that they drive to, there is not a

house or a face that is not familiar to them. Still they have few words to throw away, and none of the knowing nods, and winks, and twists of the elbows which give to our coachmen such a peculiar individuality. Your Belgium driver, snugly seated in the corner of his cabriolet, does not fatigue his neck, nerves, or muscles by exertions like these. An open look of recognition, or guttural grunt or two, is all that he deigns to bestow on his friends as he *goes;* but on his *return* he is sure to smoke a pipe, and drink a draught of beer, at every house that will afford fire for the first, and hospitality enough for the second. But in general, there is a matter-of-fact, road-book kind of accuracy about these fellows. They give you information as the pump gives water: you must eternally ply the handle; and they go at a jog-trot that would tire the patience of any one but their horses. Three miles an hour, in a by-road, is their regular pace. They are phlegmatic to the last degree. Nothing can upset them, any more than

their vehicle; and both one and the other are so used to the rough work of life, that the easy indifference with which they jog along is quite a nuisance to a man who cannot so patiently endure it.

During the time that I observed the very different kind of animal from those which I have been describing, and wondering how he could belong to such a *genus*, he, of course, took his mental measure of me. He eyed me sharply for a minute or two, jogging on beside me as I walked along, and humming his *refrain* all the while; at length, pulling up, and coming to a full stop, he said, touching the tassel of his cap by way of salutation—

"Well, Sir, I can only say that if you were driving this return cabriolet, and I walking up to my ankles in this confounded road, I should not, most assuredly, let you pass me without asking for a place."

Following his example, I called a halt, and

replied, that I preferred walking to going at a snail's pace in such a vehicle.

"Why, to be sure," said he, "we do not go at full gallop, and I cannot say much for the carriage; but it is not *that* I mean. A baggage-waggon would suit me as well as the king's coach, provided I had *company*. That's what I want. I hate being alone. I am obliged to sing myself hoarse, to keep up my spirits. In short, we are going the same road, it seems; I pass through Poperingue, and stop at Ypres, and if you are so disposed, Sir, I offer you this vacant seat, and shall be proud of your company."

So fair an offer and so original a companion were not to be resisted. I had no road to choose; so I stepped into the cabriolet, and away we went.

"Well, nothing surprises me more," *continued* my companion—for any little pause or interruption did not in the least seem to *break*

the thread of his discourse, it only put a knot on it—" nothing surprises me more than to see any man on foot who is able to pay for a carriage or hire a horse. As for myself, the whole length of *my* walking is from the stable into the court-yard, and then, pop! I spring into my cabriolet, and feel as if the seat was part of me! But never mind that—there is no accounting for fancies. Well, Sir, and what do you think of this country? for I see you are a stranger. So am I, I might say; for though I was born here, and christened with beer and tobacco, like my countrymen, and had a good education thrown away upon me, I passed all the best part of my life in the Lancers of the Guard, and made my first bow to *Messieurs les Anglais* on the field of Waterloo. Nothing could tempt me to pass my whole life in such a country as this. The women, with an exception or two, are mere lumps of mortality, and the men have not one idea to knock against another!"

This harangue was not delivered as consecutively as it is written: it was spoken in fragments, interspersed with snatches of his song; and I have forgotten a good deal. *My* occasional replies and observations are not worth noting; but thus ran on the voluble tongue of my comrade, as we entered a little, close, asthmatic-looking village, smothered between high hedges and trees, and seeming impenetrable to a breath of air:

"But what signifies, after all, whether a man be Belgian or Frenchman? Yet the miserable beings of this place presume to quarrel about it. This is the frontier village, ridiculously enough arranged. The road, running in the middle, is the line of separation. The right hand cottages are in Belgium, the left in France. The widow Vanderbroeckellen, there, on one side, sells you tobacco at ten sous a pound; while her opposite neighbour, François Delaporte, must charge you ten francs; and at that house, on the

French side, you may drink a bottle of wine for a franc, that is prohibited to the envious and thirsty dog who lives *en face.* Such are our custom-house laws, and a nice nest of smugglers they hatch here! And look at those two fellows, searchers of honest people—one French, the other Belgian—how they eye us from each side of the road! This village of La Belle, as it is called, I consider to be a stone-and-mortar reproach against two governments that think themselves, no doubt, very wise; and as for the stupid dolts that people it, imagine their coming each half way into their common street to fight for the honour of their *different* countries!"

"I am heartily glad to hear *that,*" thought I; "it *does* look like national feeling:" but I did not care to interrupt my companion, and we left La Belle behind us.

"There they go!" exclaimed he, as we were about a mile out of the village—"there they go, the real boys of the by-ways! Look at

those light-footed fellows!" and I remarked, emerging from a little lane, five or six uncommonly active young men, but reckless and vagabond-looking, each with a stick in his hand, and four, five, or more bladders slung over his shoulder, and dangling against him.

"And who are they?" asked I.

"All smugglers," answered he; "brave, open, day-light fellows, who care no more for a gens-d'arme or custom-house officer than for you or I. They have just come back from selling their tobacco in France, and are well laden with brandy in return. They have made a round to avoid the village, and are now on their road, fearing neither man nor devil."

As he spoke, two mounted gens-d'armes appeared—a loud shout from the smugglers gave the salutation—and, in an instant, the whole gang were across the hedges, and away into the thick-planted fields beyond. The gens-d'armes put spurs to their horses, drew their swords, looked in a terrible passion, and kicked up

quantities of dust, gallopped about, up some lanes, down others, swore, quite like troopers, and at last rode off in a quiet pace, side by side, having, no doubt, done their duty most faithfully.

We had not gone far when another official *satellite* of government, one of those infesters of the Belgic highways, a custom-house searcher, peremptorily stopped us, and, in no very civil mood, ordered us to descend. Then commenced a search of the carriage, of the most rigid nature. Every hole and corner was looked through and into, my small package rummaged, as though it contained a hogshead of brandy — and we were at last dismissed on our way.

While this examination went on, I said to the sworded and belted inspector—

"Do you know, my friend, that while you are wasting your time here with this empty cabriolet, you are letting real game escape you in the woods yonder?"

"Never mind that, Sir—I know my duty," was his reply.

"And take care of your *interest*," was my retort—for I was vexed with the fellow, and had no doubt of his being bribed by the smugglers.

But the most offensive *fixtures* of the roads, were the numerous huge wooden representations of the crucifixion, which always appear to me like blasphemous caricatures. They, nevertheless, excite different sensations in the country people, for at the foot of each of them, one is sure to see one or more persons at prayer. As we passed one of these, the driver observed, looking at the image—

"That is religion, as they call it. Very well! were I king, I would encourage it; for as long as a bungling carpenter and a little paint are in the country, I'll engage to rule it by the aid of these—the *true* magistrates of Belgium. Here is Poperingue—now do you think the burgo-

master and eschevins have half the authority of that image? Not they, I promise you—and to tell the truth, little worthy of authority they are! Look at this nice little town, capable of thriving, if the rich inhabitants had common spirit. But there are full a dozen of them with an income of forty or fifty thousand francs a-year each—and how do they apply it? Put it up in a strong box, and live like poor burghers on little or nothing, smoking their pipe and drinking their beer in the pot-house, talking of hops, and playing their game of ninepins! Such is a fair specimen of the small towns of this country; and you may see how far civilization has crept in, when these louts wear bob-wigs, short breeches, striped stockings, and brass buckles in their shoes. No, the reformation of loose pantaloons has not even fallen on them—and how can such a country thrive?"

After we had baited the old horse, who ate well, and seemed as if he could go on at his own pace for ever, we took again to the road, for I

had no inducement to stay in Poperingue, and we were soon on the well-paved causeway that leads to Ypres. During the two hours, consumed in covering the two leagues that separate these towns, my companion was not idle; and the following was the material part of his most fluent communications. I thought it worth noting down. for I own it really astonished me, coming from the source it did. His observations, at the time, appeared excellent, and I was afterwards confirmed in my opinion that they were so, for a reason which the reader shall hear in good time.

"Why, Sir, the fact is, that Belgium is so little known to strangers, that one might call it sequestered from the rest of Europe. Its history, its geography, the national character, are all misunderstood, and that because the books of our days are composed from those of former times—because writers prefer seeing with the eyes of others to the trouble of using their own. When an author has proclaimed that supersti-

tion and fanaticism are the foundations of the Belgic character, he thinks he has done every thing. But let us examine the fact, and look back a little. After the fall of the Roman empire this country shared the common fate. Devastated and torn to atoms by its own people, Belgium gave birth to that spirit of restlessness, and we may say *mutiny*, which has been perpetuated even to our days. By and by came the Spanish domination, and that lasted too long not to have influenced our character, and we must confess that after three hundred years that taint is not effectually washed away. In the heroic struggle against the tyranny of Spain, Belgium, in making common cause with the Dutch, could not help coming into close contact with them. Religious differences separated them again, and there remained nothing to us from the association but a strong dose of avarice. The dominion of the House of Austria, our struggles for short-lived independence, the French Revolution, and the final settlement of

our country into an acknowledged independent kingdom, must necessarily have all more or less influenced the manners and the character of the people. It is thus that, formed from so many various elements, they bear a portion of the features which distinguish each of those nations; and it is the indecision of character consequent on this, that gives them a physiognomy so difficult to be seized by the pencil of the writer. We are neither Germans, Spaniards, nor French. We have picked up from each a little of what is good, and rejected a great deal that is bad. We have remained Belgians, neither more nor less, with all that contrariety of character so puzzling to strangers who have not studied it. If a Belgian appears indifferent and cold, it is less from reality than for convenience sake; he is economical without being actually avaricious; studious and fond of ease; unimpassioned; averse to novelties; at once sober and gluttonous; modest, yet presumptuous; cold in his amours; and terrible in his enmities—he seems,

I must allow, an eternal problem of indecision, and displays a plurality of character that exists but in him."

This was, I think, the last sentence I heard from my lecturer, for an accident happened to me which I trust may not occur to my readers —I fell fast asleep; and we were at the gates of Ypres when I awoke. My companion was carelessly humming a tune, and when I opened my eyes, he "hoped I had had pleasant dreams." I assured him I was much edified by the information he had given me, and ventured to express my surprise at all he had uttered.

"Why, Sir," said he, with a most consequential and imposing air, "the fact is, I observe a little, think a good deal, and sometimes read; and I am happy to give any information in my power to a stranger whenever I happen to fall in with one. This is the *Bras d'Or*, the best inn in Ypres. Let me set you down here, and bid you farewell; only recommending you not to stay more than a day or two in this place, the

unhealthiness of which is proverbial, as a sickly-looking person, all over Flanders, is called 'a death's-head from Ypres.' Adieu, Sir."

I returned his civilities in the way most congenial to his expectations, and we parted excellent friends. I had a capital dinner, most comfortable lodging, and civil attendance; and I strolled out, to pass away the evening, rather than from any particular curiosity about the place. I walked round the ramparts, out at one of the gates, and in at another, and paid my homage to the royal arms, sculptured over it, and was duly appalled by the open-mouthed lions, each with a blunderbuss under his arm, meant, no doubt, to inspire a wholesome dread of kingly authority in the mynheers and vrowes of the neighbourhood, as they came to market.

When I re-entered the town, I stared about, like any other stranger, and at last discovered a bookseller's shop. I went in, and took up a smart little work called "Tablettes Belges.'

The very first sentence of the introduction struck me as not quite new. I read on, and, to my infinite surprise, and no small amusement, I found there every word of the cabriolet-driver's essay on the national character, and a great deal more than he delivered, which the rogue had got by heart, and passed for his own! I could not be angry with him: it was an innocent plagiarism; and I sincerely hope that if ever the author discovers it, he will imitate my indulgence, in consideration of the very original specimen of national character offered by the culprit.

TOWNS AND CHURCHES.

"God made the country, and man made the town."

COWPER.

THE exterior aspect of cities, or their examination *merely* as works of art, has never had the slightest charm for me. The cold admiration which we give to domes, or spires, or columns, oppresses rather than exhilarates us, if some associating link of feeling does not excite an interest for the object. I can wander for weeks across a foreign district of *country*, without seeking acquaint-

ances or wanting society. The ever springing varieties of nature give ample occupation to the mind; but one day spent alone in a town is intolerable. It is the very worst species of solitude, for it generates discontent with one's own desolateness, and envy for the social intercourse which seems shared by every one else. We do not consider, and console ourselves with the fact, that other strangers are labouring under the very same feelings that oppress us. Even if they are, we cannot sympathise with those we do not know; and in our solitary selfishness we only dwell on our own discomfort.

What is to be done to obtain relief? To eat one's breakfast, dinner, and supper? Then to sleep away the night? But the intervals between? "There is the rub." How to kill time—the common enemy—and to give him an easy and quiet death, the infliction of which will lie light on one's conscience. For my own part, I have a regular routine of methods, which I follow with systematic constancy, whenever I happen

to find myself in the dreary situation I allude to. I first examine carefully all the engravings, bad or indifferent, that decorate the walls of "mine inn;" and then thumb over scrupulously the torn old almanacks, or common-place pamphlets, which may (by particular good luck) be on a dusty shelf, or in a corner cupboard. I then saunter out into the streets, discarding all the officiousness of the grinning and ragged ciceroni that offer their aid, and also the swaggering assistance of the saucy varlet, ycleped on the continent *commissionaire*, who, with a smattering of bad English, forces his services upon each new comer.

Fairly launched into the unexplored intricacies of the place, my first object is, if possible *to lose myself*, because a quarter of an hour may be laudably consumed in recovering my way. I sometimes clamber up the hundred, and heaven knows how many steps, of some tower or steeple, and gaze over the parapet on the tiles and slates below me, in great wonderment that the tops of

all the houses, and the houses of all the towns should be so marvellously alike. The contracted streets and the pigmy passengers only make me moralize on the narrowness and littleness of mankind and their ways, but I wanted no such factitious elevation above my fellows to impress the lesson upon me. So down I go again, not much the better, and certainly not a bit the wiser for my ascent, and I look up at the buildings I had just been looking down upon, a gazing illustration of the ups and downs of life.

But straggling about in that kind of way, I often chance to stumble upon some half-buried association of history or romance, or knock my head against some legend or superstition, projecting beyond the crumbling walls of an old mansion or decaying monument. These I generally treasure up for after manufacture; and if I consider them worth any thing, I am, at any rate, not churlish about their value. I certainly have not reaped a fertile harvest in the towns of Belgium. There is, generally speaking, a stag-

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nant air of insipidity hanging over them like a cloud. Every attempt at gaiety seems abortive; the discordant vivacity of their *Carillons*—their miserable attempts at illuminations and fireworks. Then the ungraceful sameness of female costume, and still more unpleasant sameness of female occupation—every window in every house garnished with a languidly industrious fair one, knitting her stocking, and prying into the very secrets of the streets by means of her pair of lateral mirrors.

Churches, those favourite lounging places of my countrymen, afford me but unfrequent sanctuary, in my capacity of time-killer. I am not over fond of expiating that crime at the moment of its commission, in the aisles of a cathedral. There is too much sameness in the decorations, the pillars, pictures, altars, and pulpits, to excite me; and I have another reason for not caring much to frequent the continental Catholic churches, which has less of propriety than *amour propre* in it. I make it a rule never to look

into guide-books beforehand, for information as to what I *ought* to look at, and what I *should* admire. A sort of perverseness immediately opposes itself to the dictations of *soi-disant* taste, wherever and whenever it assails me. But I have sometimes examined such oracles *afterwards*, to find if my untaught notions of beauty or proportion tallied with the received *dicta* of the learned; and it has more than once happened to me to find that I had wasted much of my admiration, and thrown away my delighted scrutiny on objects perfectly worthless; while I passed by with indifference or disapproval *chef-d'œuvres* that I ought to have almost idolized. Now on these occasions I invariably stuck fast to my own predilection, and laughed the dictators to scorn; and I got into several scrapes, and arguments, and disputes in consequence. But as I have no pride in the affectation, or the fact of *singularity*, I think it better to keep out of the way of such mishaps. This, after all, is a puerile reason for not being a church-gazer; and

if I had no better, I should not have recorded it; but I *have* a better, at least I think so. In any catholic country, but particularly in one so pre-eminently devout as Belgium, I feel a considerable objection against straggling through the sacred edifices, at all times occupied by many pious individuals, to whom the intrusion of heretical curiosity must appear very indelicate and indecorous. These places of worship are, it is true, *open houses*, but not of *entertainment*. Their pictures and statues are placed in them not as mere objects of art, but as incitements to devotion; and those (and I avow myself one) in whom they produce but feelings of a very contrary description, had better leave them unexamined, than force their way through the prejudices and piety of a whole people, or, as it may happen, the very worthiest portion of it. Neither do I like the gorgeousness of their temples; their "*graven images*" cause me a painful sensation; and I revolt from the mental and bodily prostration of intelligent christians, in a way

that I believe to be foreign to the true spirit of their religion and its founder. Still I venerate religion even in what I think its degeneracy, and I would not wilfully insult or give pain to the lowliest fanatic who thinks he glorifies his Maker by debasing himself: and therefore, it not being my duty to teach the difference between debasement and humility, I seldom do more than listen under the porch, to the solemn pealings of the organ, or take a stolen stroll into the body of the building, at a very early or late hour, when the shades of twilight shroud the sacred pile, and a mystical obscurity seems to envelop at once the building, its occupants, and its purposes. For it is not alone to objects of religion that religious edifices are devoted. Many a worldly or worthless motive brings the mock christian there; and such scenes have ever been considered legitimate situations for subjects of romance. Veiled nuns and hooded monks are the very staple of romantic fiction; and I believe that, even at this day, occurrences

take place under the agency of such actors, equalling in mystery and horror those which the most intrepid novelist has heretofore detailed or invented. Human nature is, in fact, ever the same; and if crime does not decrease under the operation of civilization and knowledge, there is no reason that it should do so, within a convent's walls, from which both are excluded. One circumstance came to my hearing (I will not exactly say to my knowledge) of recent occurrence, and I believe of no doubtful authenticity. I will venture to relate, without exactly vouching for it; but it was told to me as fact, and was publicly believed to be such.

THE CONVENT CELL.

On a bleak and gloomy morning in the month of March, 1827, two travellers walked up the aisle of the church of St. ———, in one of the chief towns of the Netherlands. They were evidently strangers, not only to the place, which they gazed at with curiosity, but to the manners and feelings of the congregation, for they were observed to walk carelessly past the *Benitier*, without dipping their fingers in the blessed water; nor did they bend their knees as they crossed before the altar, while they care-

lessly sat down, on two of the rush-bottomed chairs, with high backs and a ledge on the upper bar, intended for the support of the kneeling pious, and the prayer-books used in their devotions.

The strangers produced no books, nor did they evince any profound respect for the celebration of the service, which inspired such reverence in those around them. The half-uttered expressions and mystical attitudes of the priest, the shrill responses of the boys who "served the mass," the tinkling of the bell, which was echoed by the beating on the breasts of the assembly, and even the elevation of the Host, which caused the heads of the crowd to bend in awful humility to the earth, failed to excite in the strangers any thing beyond a listless gaze of wonderment, or a casual smile, while an expression of blended compassion and contempt seemed to play round their lips.

Still there was nothing of actual levity in their manner; nothing, in short, which any

liberal-minded devotee (if such things are) might not have excused in the bearing of two heretics, unaccustomed to Roman Catholic rites, and acting from the impulses of inexperience and youth. For they were both young, under five-and-twenty; and they had that reckless and independent air which mark the citizens of a free country. They were, in fact, Americans, who with a full fund of health, money, and ardour for variety, and a sufficient acquaintance with modern languages, had just arrived in Europe, and were starting on their journey in quest of knowledge and adventures.

They had landed a day or two before at Ostend, from London, and this was their first visit to a Roman Catholic church, in a Roman Catholic country.

But although the celebration of mass seemed little to interest or excite either of the strangers, they were both, and one of them particularly, affected in no slight degree, by the appearance of six or eight nuns, who belonged to a convent

which adjoined the church, and who were seated high apart from the rest of the congregation, in a half-concealed gallery appropriated to their sole use, in the immediate neighbourhood of the altar.

But these *religieuses* seemed not to shrink entirely from observation. They were mostly young; but, with one exception, they did not possess any powerful attraction, beyond what was associated with their interesting, and to the strangers, their romantic profession. We may easily imagine the effect produced upon the republicans, alive to every illustration of European *picturesqueness*, as they listened to the solemn pealing of the organ, gazed on the antique pile, and fixed their minds, as well as their observation, on the group of devoted females, more interesting than all by which they were surrounded. But the friends differed in character. One was calm, calculating, and cold: the other ardent, susceptible, and enthusiastic. The one looked on the nuns as he would have observed a

series of historical paintings, as documents of manners and customs, the origin and effects of which he employed himself in tracing. The other entered into the contemplation of "the sisters" with all the warmth of flesh-and-blood excitement, mused on their abandonment of the world, and would have pierced the secret recesses of their hearts.

He was, however, after a short time, roused to a more minute and personal train of thought, by observing, beyond any possibility of doubt, that one of the nuns, who had most pretensions to beauty, fixed her looks upon him with an uncommon intenseness, and in a manner so remarkable, as to cause him at length considerable embarrassment. There was something in the expression of her countenance, and in the determined scrutiny of her gaze, that made him almost shudder. She was handsome certainly. Her features were regular and marked; but she was pale to sallowness, and her dark eyes had a

restlessness of motion, that seemed caused by an unquiet mind.

The young American gradually recovered from his embarrassment, but he scarcely regained his self-possession, for the feelings which succeeded were somewhat bewildering. Vanity, the natural weakness of a youthful mind, conscious that it was allied to a handsome person, began to work strongly on the feelings of the stranger, and his heart bounded, and his head seemed to swim round, at the thought that his appearance had excited some irresistible tenderness in the breast of the nun. The notion that she had fixed her thoughts on him, in preference to his friend who sat beside him, gratified him in a double sense; and his bosom being thus softened by the inward workings of self-love, became more susceptible to the impressions stamped on it by another. The consequence was, that he began to fancy an interest stronger and deeper than he really felt; and giving him-

self up to the delusion, he had no doubt of the existence of a secret and unaccountable sympathy between himself and the *religieuse*.

He felt his cheeks glow, and he gave to his looks the tenderest expression of which they were capable. He saw an answering flush rise on the pallid brow of the nun, and a smile, that thrilled through him—but not with unmixed delight—played for an instant on her colourless lips. Her eyes then sank down, and her face resumed its calm and sculptured look.

He still fixed on her his fascinated gaze; yet while he did so, a strange mixture of sensations crowded upon him. Did she already love him? Could *that* be possible? and was her present downcast air, the effect of the struggle which modesty had sustained against passion? Then she might be unhappy—ill treated—tyrannized over; and she might have fixed her suppliant hopes on him for protection and redress. But again, some dark and treacherous design might have prompted her magnetic gaze! The last

misgiving he instantly abandoned, as unmanly and unjust. But one point was certain—she had fixed upon him in a marked and singular way; she had acknowledged his looks and replied to them; he was so far committed, and she compromised. There might be risk in following up the adventure—but it might lead to happiness—or what is considered so by the unbridled ardour of warm and youthful hearts; and come what might, he resolved not to shrink from the result.

Absorbed in these agitating reflections, he did not remark the priest quitting the altar and entering the vestry, nor the congregation one by one departing from the church. He only saw the one object of his deep attention, and he did not even observe that her companions had left their places, and that she alone occupied the gallery.

His friend, who had for some minutes closely watched him, at length recalled him to recollection; and in a suppressed tone rallied him on

his reverie, and on the intense manner in which he gazed on the remaining nun, who seemed buried in the depth of devotion. Thus roused, and brought to himself, the young man prepared to accompany his friend, ashamed of the seriousness which he had betrayed, and which he felt that he could not shake off.

They were on the point of quitting their places and retiring from the almost deserted church; the friend of the young lover, for so we must call him, had turned round and made a few steps in the direction of the door, and the lover himself was about to follow, when his parting look at the nun was answered by an imploring glance from her quick raised eyes, and a momentary, but intelligible motion with her finger that he should remain.

These ambiguous communications made him start, and almost tremble. He could not comprehend, nor had he time to question the motives of the nun. He had promptly to form his decision—and he at once resolved to stay;

he therefore stepped quickly after his friend—avowed his intention to linger a little longer in the church—received with a smile the bantering caution which told him to beware—and then, as his friend went out, he sauntered awhile up and down the aisles, in apparent examination of the pictures and statues; and in a little while he was satisfied that the church was wholly deserted, except by himself and the object of his growing solicitude.

He felt an awkward anxiety to address her; but there was an awfulness in her bearing that irresistibly repelled him, and he felt himself completely the creature of her will. She threw an occasional look, in reply to his impatient glances, which told him he must suppress his impetuosity and wait her pleasure. He resigned himself willingly to the course of the adventure, every moment adding to his excitement, and a tumult of wild sensations revelling in his breast.

After some time his fascinator rose slowly from the place where she had so long knelt;

and descending by a back stair from the private gallery, she passed by the rear of the grand altar; and once more took a kneeling posture in a narrow recess opposite a little shrine, where burned a single lamp. He followed her movements, encouraged, painfully, by her doubtful smile, and the suppressed gesture, which pointed out to him the position near her which she wished him to take.

He at length leaned against a pillar, his hands folded across, and as if in close observation of a fine statue of the Virgin, and within a few yards of the real object of his almost breathless attention.

With her head low bent, and inclined towards him, while she turned over her beads with much apparent devotion, she asked him, in a deep whisper,

"Do you understand French?"

"Yes," murmured he.

"Do you speak it?"

"Not sufficiently to express your influence on me."

This was answered by her wonted smile—"Good God, is it *satisfaction* or *triumph!*" thought the American.

"If you can see any thing in me to interest you," continued she, "are you inclined to do me a service?"

"*Am* I!" replied he, with energy—"try me—put me to the proof!"

"It is no trifle," said she, solemnly.

"Any thing is trifling that can enable me to serve you; for any thing short of death command me!"

"And if death *did* cross your path in this adventure?" exclaimed she, with a full expression of voice, and a piercing solemnity of look.

"By Heavens I'd spurn even it," cried he; "you have exalted me to a pitch of excitement, I know not how or wherefore."

"You are an enthusiast!" said she, a somewhat more softened expression blending in her smile.

"I know not what I am; but it is you who have made me so, be it what it may. I am new in this country—I seem to walk in enchantment—I swear myself yours!"

Here irresistibly followed the impulse which bade him to kneel down, and he directed looks as fond and thoughts as fervent at his neighbour nun as ever devotee could have meant for the pretended object of her present worship. The nun smiled one final smile of ghastly solemnity. The American could less than ever read its meaning. She had evidently a great purpose in view. She had selected him for her agent—he was bound to her he knew not how.

"I am satisfied with you," resumed she. "I believe you to be a man of honour; and that fine person and striking face cannot be allied to an ignoble soul: I feel myself safe in your hands. You perceive that the rules of my order are not the strictest; but their discovered infringement is ruin; and I am now infringing

them. I can speak to you no more at present —I have run a fearful risk. But meet me outside that little portal to-night at nine. I will admit you punctually as the clock strikes. Vespers will be over, and the church in solitude. You must not speak; but trust to me: follow me, and count on my gratitude."

"May I, then, hope?"

"You may hope every thing from a grateful woman, who admires you, and *must* love you, if you serve her as she expects."

"Enough—you must run no further risk—at nine I will be at the little portal."

"Adieu!" murmured she, in a soft tone; and in a minute the American had left the church.

As he passed away in high exultation, and just as he turned one of the massive buttresses which supported the venerable pile, a man, in a sort of half-official uniform, armed with a sword, turned his eyes from an advertisement pasted

against the wall, and fixed them on the American.

"A word with you, Sir, if you please," said he, in tolerable French, taking off his three-cornered and orange-cockaded hat.

"What can you have to say to me, my friend?" asked the American, in a haughty and somewhat abstracted air.

"Why, just this much, Sir; that, as a stranger, you ought to be cautious of your conduct. Your indecorous and flippant manner during the celebration of mass has made you a marked man; and the friendship of an agent of the police, willing to protect you, is not perhaps to be spurned."

"Oh, I am quite equal to my own protection in all cases!" proudly replied the stranger. He was in that state of mind that makes a sanguine man think every thing *must* go well with him, and that it would be a disgrace, even in difficulty, to look for the help of others Besides, he thought this man might, perhaps,

be some impostor, lying in wait for foreigners, to extort money from them under false threats of danger and vain promises of support. "You may pass on," said the American.

"You may repent this!" replied the other.

CHAPTER II.

The American found his countryman awaiting him at the hotel; and, after a few preliminary arrangements of thought, suited to the important occasion, he told him every thing that had passed, from the time he had quitted him in the church, until he had himself left it in the sole tenantry of the mysterious nun.

The friend, on hearing this confession, felt perhaps, at first, a slight sensation of jealousy and envy, at the better fortune of his companion. But as they were sincerely attached to each

other, and had started under a fair agreement of non-interference in their mutual adventures, *that* feeling passed lightly over, and only left an anxiety for the perfect safety of his fellow traveller.

He did not exactly like the aspect of the affair. There was too much romance in it, if *real*, too much trickery, if *pretence*, to suit his steady temperament and well regulated habits. He thought it strange in any way; although he could not help admitting that his friend was a striking sort of fellow, one likely to inspire a feeling more than ordinary, in a woman accustomed to adventure, and having an object in view. It was then again possible that all this parade about doing her some secret service might be merely meant to heat his imagination and inflame his feelings. But what if she really had some quarrel to avenge, and that she had artfully worked on him, and meant further to do so, to involve him in some matter of serious danger? The *friend* turned all things studiously

in his mind; while the *principal* carelessly paced the room with buoyant heart, and thinking (if he thought at all) that nothing could thwart his success, or mar his coming happiness.

Never did day pass heavier or seem longer than did this to the lover. Hours and half hours, as they sounded their monotonous chimes from the various belfries, sending out the same tones of tedium and delay, worked him up to a fit of nervous fermentation. His friend did all he could to allay it, but he participated himself in the anxiety, which spurred them on, while it seemed to retard them from the end of the adventure.

Every plank of the boarded and sanded salon which they occupied, was paced in unreckonable repetitions. Every possible method to hasten the wings of time vainly employed. At length all in-door efforts being exhausted, a walk without was proposed, accepted, and undertaken. But scarcely had the friends sallied forth, when they were assailed by various insulting symptoms,

from a group of boys, among whom some men were intermingled, who seemed to have lain in wait for, and were now resolved to annoy them. The lover walked on for some time, unconscious of what passed around him, for he was of that fearless spirit that does not anticipate danger, and he never thought of the warnings of the police agent. Besides which, he was at the moment borne far away, on the wings of the abstraction to which he had delivered up his mind.

His friend was more observing and sensible of peril, though a firm and decided man at the time of its approach. He therefore spoke to his absorbed companion, and asked him if he could account for the evident marks of hostile feeling in the conduct of the persons near them.

"Not I," replied he. "I neither observed them, nor think them worth observation. I suppose they are only venting their curiosity, for we can have excited no other feeling."

"I differ with you, my friend. The expres-

sion of those faces means more than that, and some of those fellows are muttering some insolent jargon. Yonder, however, is a man in an official dress, one of the police, perhaps; it would be well to put ourselves under his protection, I think, for no glory is to be gained in a contest here."

"Yes, that is the very fellow who told me I was a marked man, and offered to take care of me. I now remember him."

"A marked man? For what?"

"For not having been devout enough at mass, I believe."

"Indeed! then we must be cautious. We stand on perilous ground; for if notice has been taken by this bigotted people of any indecorum in our bearing, it might go hard with us. I will speak to that man, whom you seem to slight so much."

So saying, the cautious traveller at once approached the police officer, and addressed him; but he received nearly the same sort of reception

which his friend had lately given to the municipal object of his application. The fellow put on a fierce air, and replied to the request that he would not suffer two foreigners to be insulted by a parcel of ragamuffins,

"Ay, now that my assistance *is* required, you are both civil enough; but you may *now* take care of yourselves, and let your friend suffer for his haughty rejection of my offers."

"My good fellow," replied the American, "you must attribute anything in the manners of that gentleman to his imperfect knowledge of the habits of this country, and of the language perhaps. I apologize for him, and request that you will now, without hesitation, just walk with us to our hotel."

With these words he stamped an impression on the policeman's hand, which left its tangible mark there as he closed his fingers upon it; that impression, which, following such a discourse to such a person, is like the seal upon a letter, giv-

ing authenticity and consequence to all that has gone before.

"Well, I'll tell you so far," said the policeman, *feeling* the amount of the piece of money, which he did not deign to look at, "you are a civil and fair-spoken gentleman, and I'll not refuse your request. I'll walk with you, and nothing shall happen to *you*, I promise you. Let your proud companion take care of himself, as I said before; I told him he might repent his incivility, and he *may* yet."

"Well, then," said the American, "I'll just take him under the arm, for I must not desert him, you know, and you will keep close to *me*."

He accordingly took his friend's arm in his, and extricated him from the gathering crowd, in reply to whose insults he threw looks of most aristocratical, republican contempt; and, escorted as agreed upon, they soon regained their hotel. Arrived there, these late occurrences were soon forgotten by the most prominent actor in the events I am recording. His mind reverted

to the one object of its anxieties, and fixed itself upon it. His friend, who saw what had just passed in a more serious view, resolved that the result of his companion's adventure once over, they should immediately quit the place; and he accordingly desired post-horses to be in readiness for their carriage at a very early hour the next morning.

This point arranged, dinner was ordered unusually early, to break the tediousness of the unemployed day; and no sooner was it dispatched than the friends regretted it was not to come over again, as the vacant hours of evening seemed to gape before them like the mouth of some drear and unexplored cavern. To add to the discomfort of the situation, the decline of day was accompanied by most dismal weather. Rain and hail rattled against the windows, and gusts of wind swept mournfully through the streets.

One resource alone was left to the friends—wine! and to that genial comforter and care-

killer they betook themselves. They drank freely and fairly by their coal fire; and in the warmth of conversation they soon became inattentive to, and undisturbed by, the intrusive pattering against the closed shutters, and the boisterous swell of the increasing storm. Their conversation, following the capricious course which imagination suddenly turned into, reverted to home, to old friends, dear connexions, and early days, when, happily, innocent of the fierce joys of manhood, the unreckoned years flew by. In these far and bygone recollections the matter of the moment was for a while forgotten; and hour after hour chimed out, astonishing the friends at their quick succession. At length the earliest clock struck nine. The lover, whose temporary abstraction to other days and distant scenes had not left him unwatchful of the actual march of time, knew that although nine o'clock was *sounded*, half past eight was *meant*—half an hour being thus, according to the habit of the Belgian belfries, announced in advance, for some

better reason, no doubt, than the most obvious one — to puzzle the heedless, and tantalize the watchful citizen.

The lover sprang from his chair, startling his friend from a reverie of home and happiness. But he quickly understood the cause of the abrupt movement, and he prepared to accompany the adventurer as far as he might, consistent with *propriety* (if I may apply the term in such a case) and with *prudence*, as regarded the safety of his friend. There was a full half hour to spare before the time of rendezvous, and the friend pressed strongly, but unsuccessfully, the uselessness of quitting the hotel, and braving the storm, which raged more violently than ever, before the few minutes required to reach the church. But, warmed anew with wine, and all the ardent feelings of his nature in action, he cared alike for weather or advice, and in spite of both he put on his hat, and threw his cloak around him, declaring that further delay was intolerable, and that he *must* be gone.

His friend, finding him determined, also equipped himself for going out, and a sharp contest immediately took place on the question, which answered admirably the friend's object, to gain time. The lover insisted on his friend's remaining at home, smiling at the notion of danger, and protesting strongly against another partaking the unpleasantness of an adventure the happiness of which he could not share. The friend, however, was obstinate, in his turn; and the contest ended in both leaving the house together, and making their way, through all the obstructions of wind, rain, and darkness, to the gloomy mass of building which the lover recognized as the church of St. ———; and they took their station in one of the most covered recesses, formed by the projection of the grotesque and ancient architecture.

In this imperfect shelter, shivering in cold and wet, they felt the heavy minutes brush past them with their leaden wings. No object was abroad, save the figure of a man who twice

crossed the nook they were concealed in, but of whom they could distinguish nothing more.

At length the first stroke of the *ninth* hour came hollowly borne towards them, by a descending gust of wind. The lover seized his friend's hand, pressed it in nervous, yet triumphant agitation, whispered farewell! as faintly as if the divine walls might divine his secret in the word, and rapidly stepped in the direction of the little portal, at some paces distant, round an angular projection. For a moment his friend remained motionless, but recovering himself, he followed, with long and cautious strides, the flying footsteps that guided him on. He was in an instant close to the lover, and giving his strained observation to the portal, which he could barely distinguish, he saw it darkly open, just wide enough to admit the anxious expectant, who rapidly glided in. It was instantly closed again; and the friend, with a feeling of heaviness and oppression, he could neither successfully combat nor account for,

turned from the church as the ninth stroke was hurriedly borne away into the clouds by the rude blast that rioted through the towers and turrets. The same figure that had crossed them before now passed still closer to him; and exclaiming, loud enough to silence the roaring wind, "Take care of yourself—you had been better at your hotel!"—it disappeared in the gloom.

"This does look like danger of some secret kind," thought the American, as he vainly attempted to pierce the darkness in the direction which the figure took. "I must if possible know more;" and he instantly followed with the intention of stopping and questioning it. But his attempt was vain. Favoured by the deep gloom, the figure had turned into some of the narrow lanes close to the church, and was no where to be seen.

"Take care of myself!" exclaimed the American. "If I have need of care, how much more has my brave and reckless friend! No,

I must not see my hotel again until he is free from this affair. Here will I watch for his return. I am not worse off than the sentries who pace the unsheltered ramparts—this is my post."

He regained the little portal, and buttoning his large travelling coat tightly about him, he stood close under the porch, which protected him from the straight falling rain, but by no means against the sudden and violent squalls which at times gathered the rain like a shroud, as they swept along, and dashed it in a liquid sheet full against the voluntary sufferer. In a short time he was thoroughly drenched, and so benumbed with cold, that he was fain to quit his station, and move about in open exposure to the storm, to force his blood to circulate, and give action to his cramped limbs.

In this comfortless state of body, which was however unheeded in the increasing agitation of his mind, the staunch and anxious friend continued to pace close before the portal, while the

chimes told three times over their half hour's monotonous attempt at melody. The quarter of the town where stood the church, was inhabited almost entirely by the poorer orders of the people, and one by one the lights had disappeared from their wretched dwellings. It was near eleven o'clock, and all was desolate: the rain had ceased, the wind had died away, and the American almost wished for the fierce fellowship of the storm once more, in preference to the dismal calm, which, spite of his natural intrepidity, made him shudder.

Almost exhausted by mental and bodily agitations he had actually resolved to strike for admittance at the portal; and in case of failure in that attempt to acquire intelligence of his friend, he determined to demand the assistance of the military guard, which he had observed to be stationed in the chief square of the town.

For the purpose of putting the first of these resolutions into effect, he approached the portal, and raised the little knocker, but his hand refused

to strike. A feeling crossed his mind of the objection to so direct and personal an interference. He thought that it might give offence to his friend, who was perhaps after all in perfect safety, and only detained by the happy consequences of his adventure. It might compromise the safety—the life even—of the female concerned. It was perhaps indecorous, premature, unnecessary. He paused, and resolved at length to wait still half an hour, before he took any more decided step than to continue his watching.

He accordingly recommenced his steady pace, and had scarcely made three or four turns, when he heard the hinges of the portal slowly sound. He instantly placed himself close, but concealed from view. The portal was opened and shut, with the greatest speed, and the least possible noise. The figure of his friend was visible to the anxious American, and he rejoiced at his return from that place of peril, and was only restrained by a sense of delicacy from abruptly accosting, and congratulating him. He was

quite close behind him, and he observed him to move forward hurriedly, but not with that light and easy movement which marked his usual carriage. The friend stepped on, and was astonished and grieved to distinguish, almost beyond a doubt, that the lover bore beneath his cloak, and supported on his shoulder, a burthen, which from its length and general shape was, as well as he could form a judgment, a human form.

This discovery, or almost certain conjecture, perplexed and distressed him greatly. The imprudence, the risk, in carrying off this nun, and intruding such an embarrassment on their travelling arrangements, appeared unwise, ill-considered, and unpardonable in the highest degree. But his first impulses of angry regret were suppressed by the forgiving friend, and he determined to follow closely the movements of the offender to be able to judge what were his plans and intentions. He accordingly kept on his track, just near enough to run no risk of losing him, nor of being in his turn counter-

watched, either by the lover or the prize he carried. He easily perceived there was little danger of the latter observing him, for the cloak was kept carefully covering the head, which reclined loosely on the bearer's shoulder. He heard not even a whisper, as they went along, and he felt something solemn, and even unholy, in the silence, unbroken but by the heavy tramp of his friend's footsteps under his sacrilegious burthen.

After a little time, in which they traversed several by-streets, through which the lover passed, as though he had been directed well, they reached one of those canals with which the town abounded, and the lover unhesitatingly descended one of the flights of steps, which facilitate the landing of goods from the barges, and the embarkation of persons employed.

"Heavens!" exclaimed the watchful friend to himself, "can he be wild enough to bear her off at night, in some open boat—God knows where! Where or how will this adventure end?"

He placed himself close to the quay wall, and looked over the parapet. He saw his friend on the steps; there was no boat of any kind stationed near or in sight—yet the lover continued to descend!

"What can this mean? what frantic feat can be destined to conclude this affair?" muttered the careful guardian, as he watched with intense interest; and *as* he watched, he observed the object of his care to disencumber himself of his burthen; a figure in black emerged from beneath the cloak, and a heavy plunge in the stagnant water was the signal of its disappearance.

The perpetrator of this appalling deed immediately ascended the steps. The shocked witness felt his blood run curdling through his veins. His eye seemed doubly fixed on his retreating friend, and on the rippled surface of the water where the body sank. The American could not swim, or he would have suffered no hesitation in the course to be pursued. He was therefore obliged to gaze in motionless horror, and the

safety of his friend kept him mute, for to call for assistance was to reveal the murderer! He felt himself, therefore, as it were, an involuntary accomplice in the deed; but it was no time for acute reflection. The figure of his friend was rapidly passing away; and as he turned from the fatal spot to follow him, he saw the water softly and silently closing over its hidden prey.

He quickly gained upon his friend, who, to his astonishment, took the direct road to the hotel. They arrived there at the same moment; and they recognised each other without exchanging a word. A simultaneous pressure of the hand was their only salutation; and the friend shuddered to feel, that the one he clasped was cold and clammy. The door opened to their summons, and they mounted together to their chamber.

CHAPTER III.

The mutual agitation of the young men kept them for some minutes silent. The desperate appearance of the unfortunate *lover*, if we still must so distinguish him, was quite dreadful to his friend: he looked like a man half drunk, half dead; the upper part of his face, his brow, and cheeks, were flushed; a flood of perspiration was on his forehead; and his eyes stared wildly, as if bodily pain was joined with mental agony. His lips were livid and contracted, and all around them, above and below, with his chin and jaws, were pallid, while in two or three

places, broad marks of blood lay on, and changed the expression of, his countenance.

Seeing that his friend gazed at him with such an expression of terror, he started from his seat, rushed towards the looking-glass that hung above the mantle-piece, and convulsively springing back, uttered in a voice that thrilled through his friend—

"Oh, God! his blood is on my face, but not on my *hands*. Look—look—they are unstained! Oh let me wipe out these frightful marks!" and, with frantic anxiety, he deluged his face with water, until he had successfully cleared the blood away.

"My friend, my friend! what does all this mean?" cried his agitated companion; "for Heaven's sake, relieve my anguish—what has happened to you—what fatal result?"

"Hush, hush!" replied the other; "give me a moment's time—you shall know all—every thing that I *may* tell. Sit down—I must begin regularly and as collectedly as I can."

He placed himself beside his friend, close to the fire, the blaze from which threw its lurid flash to mix with the wild and varied colouring of his face; and it gave to him altogether a look of more than human awfulness and horror.

"I left you, my friend, as the clock struck *nine*—that fatal and accursed hour, which sounded the knell of my happiness, and began the misery of my life!" It was in these words the unfortunate young man commenced his recital. He trembled as he spoke, and looked fearfully round the room; his friend caught the contagion, and listened with terrified attention as he continued.

"My blood was on fire; the wine I had drunk worked fiercely in my brain; and the novelty, the wildness, and the peril of the adventure, wound me up to a pitch of frenzied enthusiasm. I was fit for any thing—I only wanted a tempter—and there was one at hand! —I followed her, holding her robe in trembling agitation—she spoke not, nor did I. We walked

through the cloisters of the church, cautiously, and on tip-toe; yet the echoes of our steps sounded through the vast building. It was utterly dark. I could scarce restrain myself from seizing my conductress in my arms—but the sacred place was soon violated! By winding stairs and narrow passages we passed through the precincts of the church, and reached the secret way to the convent cells. We entered *her's*—Oh, God! how that little space has become my world, of recollection, of remorse, of horror!—We entered her cell. All was silent as death—the sisterhood slept, or perhaps performed *their* guilty orgies in secrecy like *us*.

"A little lamp glimmered before a crucifix and skull that stood upon a table. Two coarse chairs completed the furniture—a bed stood in a recess, concealed by a dark curtain—God of Heaven, why was that curtain ever drawn!

"She instantly lighted two tapers and illuminated her deeply expressive countenance. Her eyes glowed like brilliants—that awful

smile curled her lip—in short, she looked to me divine, more than woman !"

"My dearest friend," interrupted his companion, "you are unwell; restrain yourself for the present; you require repose—you speak with difficulty."

"No, no, 'tis nothing—let me go on—I am agitated, but no more—I will finish my detail. I cannot, if I would, repeat all that I spoke or she replied. The foolish ravings of a man half mad, or the confiding converse of a woman—of any woman—are not to be told ! But should I keep faith with her ?—What has she driven me to ? The time flew past — she was divine — I, excited beyond manly endurance, pressed her to seal my happiness—she reminded me of my vow. I swore—how deeply, how blasphemously I swore !—that I was ready to do her bidding.

"'You are !' cried she: 'then drink to the safe end of your enterprize ! The cell of a nun is not unfurnished for a lover's indulgence !' With these words she produced wine—I gulped

down bumper after bumper, and I felt my head swim in a fiercer round than ever, and I clasped the nun in my arms. 'Hold!' cried she, 'not yet—you must first perform your task.'

"I am ready," replied I, "for aught you can require, or man accomplish—speak." Her looks here took a new expression—awful, and dark, and desperate!—'You will not fail?' she asked, and her words seemed to rattle in her throat—the look and the tone were in terrific unison. 'Put me to the test,' exclaimed I, in furious and impassioned agitation. 'Strain your nerves then to their boldest stretch—you have a dark and dismal task to do—nothing to excite your manly spirit—nought to stir up your young blood. *My* wrongs are already *avenged*—you have but to hide the victim and the deed in equal oblivion. Look here—firmly and boldly!' with these words she drew back the dark, coarse curtain of her bed.—Oh! what a thrill of agony shot through me as I gazed. The dead body of a priest, in his professional

costume, lay stretched on the bed. His face pronounced him to be young.—Two or three wounds were gaping in his breast and side—his features were distorted—his eyes wide staring—his mouth unclosed. I could not, for some moments, turn my looks away. I felt frozen to the spot. At length I looked at *her*. Her face was almost black with strained emotion. All the dark passions of the soul seemed struggling to give it the gloomiest and most hideous expression. I felt at the moment nothing but disgust and dread; for I confess it, I thought at the instant I stood by some fiend in human form.

"'Well,' said she, with demoniac imperiousness; 'now to fulfil your vow. Take that base body in your arms, bear it hence, and fling it into the first canal.'

"I thought I should have sunk on the floor; nothing could have been so hatefully revolting to me. Five minutes before I could have performed anything. Murder itself would not have ar-

rested my frantic passion. But now, all was changed, and chilled, and paralyzed; and this cold-blooded participation in the dreadful deed was beyond my power. I told her I *could* not do it. Why, oh, why must I remember what followed! I cannot repeat it—my oath, my honour are pledged—but, stronger still, her safety is at stake. Even *she* must not be endangered. Nothing that wears the female form but is sacred against man's betrayal!—Imagine all the rest, my friend—her overpowering blandishments—my maddened, infuriated delight! Oh, Heavens! close upon the scene—odious to myself, for ever let me hide myself.—The fiend, the fiend! what refinement in horrible guilt—that deeply, doubly polluted bed!—that damned cell! The dead man by our side!"

Exhausted and worn out, the young man sunk down, muttering impassioned and incoherent ravings like these. His friend, by assiduous care, brought him to himself; and his reviving expressions were of deep anxiety lest

he should have betrayed the secrets of the nun. His friend assured him he had not, and he became tranquil, and began to continue his recital.

"I took the stiff and bloody body in my arms, and, with a demon's strength, I flung it on my shoulders. She wrapped my cloak around *us*, and she led the way, and *we* descended—the lifeless head lay by my face, cheek to cheek, and the hands flapped against me as I walked. How had I power to bear it on?"

Just as he finished these words, he was seized with a sudden and violent fit of vomiting; his face became convulsed and blackened; and cold showers of sweat poured from his forehead. His eyes rolled, his lips quivered, and every sign of mortal agony was displayed in his whole form. He pressed his friend's hand, but could not speak a word. The latter, at once shocked and affrighted, called loudly for help; and at his summons, as it would appear, the room was in a moment filled with police officers, headed

by two magistrates, with their satellite attendants —a long official train.

With true municipal indifference they began to examine and accuse the suffering object of their search and their vengeance. Their authority for the intrusion was proudly demanded by the afflicted American, who laboured to assuage the agony of his friend. They replied, by producing a writing *in a female hand*, stating that "a murder had been that morning committed on the person of a young Dominican Father—the confessor of the convent, that the body was concealed, but would be that night between nine o'clock and twelve, flung into a canal, specifying its name, by the perpetrator of the crime." This paper was said to have been secretly conveyed to a police agent that evening, and that man was appointed to watch at the place and time mentioned—and he witnessed the truth of the denunciation, and tracked the *convicted* murderer. So spoke the legal authority! This man was instantly recognized by the American, as he who

had figured in the day's proceedings. He remembered his pique against his hapless friend, and his smothered expressions of enmity. Could he be at the bottom of this affair, and leagued with the female fiend, that found an instrument to hide her guilt in his ardent and unsuspecting friend, and then laid a sure train, to let her secret and her new victim perish together!

But while this thought passed in his anxious mind, a deadlier and surer means of safety and secrecy on her part was fatally developed. The suffering culprit, as he now was deemed, every moment gave symptoms of increasing agony. He writhed in torture, and minute by minute lost every chance of life. His eyes closed, his hands dropped motionless, the coming signs of death pressed on him. The last words he uttered were, "The wine!—the wine!—poisoned!"—when a desperate spasm freed him from suffering and life.

The friend, stunned as if by some heavy blow, stood statue-like beside the corpse, holding one

clammy hand, and gazing on the discoloured and distorted face. The municipal observers were shocked at the unlooked for catastrophe, that snatched a victim from the laws. They soon, however, commenced to arrange their official reports of the strange transactions of that eventful day; and they gave little time to the surviving traveller, before they began their interrogatories, plainly warning him that he was implicated as being an accomplice in the murder, being distinguished on the spot where the body was plunged into the water, and seen to return to the hotel, with the unfortunate perpetrator of the deed.

This sounded really serious, and the American amidst his anguish had strength and clearness of mind sufficient to look upon his perilous position, and to see it in all its bearings. It was plain to him that matter enough existed (if the vengeful spirit of religion was aroused) to lead to his sacrifice; and, in all the difficulty of the trying scene, he summoned resolution and

firmness sufficient to follow the best straightforward course on every occasion of life—to speak the truth wholly, and without reserve; and he detailed with great precision almost word for word as heretofore stated, the transactions of the day.

The singular relation startled and puzzled the hearers. They could not doubt the truth of the statement, for it bore in every word and every look of the American the stamp of implicit veracity. But though they privately and individually believed the shocking facts, it was decided that, publicly and collectively, they must not be even *tolerated.* So heavy a stroke at the sanctity of the town—the virtue of the pious sisterhood—the inviolability of the faith—the sacredness, and holiness, and infallibility of the Mother Church! Was such to be sounded abroad into the wide ears of the vulgar world? No, no! The dead priest was to be fished up from his watery grave, and quietly placed within an earthly tomb. His disappearance

was to be wondered at; his murder hushed up; the nun, her actions, and her agents left in congenial gloom and doubt; and truth, poor truth, for a million of millions of times, mercilessly doomed to be *smothered*, without remorse, and against all chances of resuscitation!

But to all this suppression of facts there was one objection. The deposition of the American was a sturdy document; and he himself seemed a man who would speak out, in defence of the reputation of his murdered friend; and he might cry for revenge against the supposed perpetrator of the deed? But the junta of authority thought, and rightly, that they could overcome this difficulty.

They accordingly, in the first place, represented to the young man his own personal danger, were he prosecuted on the evidence within their reach; next, they shewed him the impossibility of his establishing the pretended facts of his recital, their only witness being no more; again, they assured him that his deceased

friend's good name should suffer no attaint, as the whole of the circumstances being suppressed, all mention of him was at an end. They therefore proposed to him to quit the place at once—at the moment; leaving to them the care of the last christian rites to the body, which could not rise up in reproaches against him for a forced abandonment.

The American, at first, revolted against the idea of leaving the last duties to be performed by strangers' hands. But he was strong-minded as well as good-hearted. He examined the case in every aspect, and he accepted the compromise thus offered. He left the town *alone*, in the dark deep night, in desolate bewilderment of mind, and with a sad and sinking heart, but thereby securing the safety of his own life, and avoiding the scandal to his unfortunate companion's fame. Whither he turned his course I know not—nor could I trace the name of either.

Every one in the knowledge of these transactions was sworn to secrecy; and an induce-

ment almost as strong held out in the threat of instant *destitution* to him who should violate the pledge. But (and how it happened must be decided by those who know,) the facts transpired—the recital became public—and, from one of the many mouths that were soon filled with it, it found its way to *my pen;* which, knowing no vow of secrecy, and having no place to lose, may stand acquitted of either impiety or imprudence in sending the story further.

THE LIVING ALCHYMIST.

Will you believe antiquity ?—records ?
I'll shew you a book where Moses, and his sister,
And Solomon, have written of the art ;
Aye, and a treatise penned by Adam,
O' the philosopher's stone, and in high Dutch.

BEN JONSON.

IT will scarcely be credited that there still exists a man who believes in the wild visions of Alchymy, devotes his life to its pursuits, and conceives himself within the reach of the deepest of its long sought and long laughed at mysteries. Yet such a mortal does exist ; and it has been my good luck to see, converse with, and

appropriate him. For he is mine, in fee—positive freehold, without quit-rent or crown-rent, tithe or tax; and I, like a generous proprietor, am about to shew him to the world, as, perhaps, the very last specimen of a genus supposed to have been totally extinct.

Nothing could exceed my incredulity when I was informed of the existence of this man. I little thought that, in this age of knowledge and sunlight, a human moth could be found, singeing his wings in the taper of *such* a superstition. But my scepticism soon yielded to conviction; and that was accompanied by the pleasure I always feel from each new proof of those lingering illusions, the poetry of life, so fast dissolving before philosophy and *fact*.

The singular being in question is an inhabitant and a native of one of the cities of Belgium, where many scattered remnants are to be met with of those coarse webs, in which the speculative ardour of times past enveloped the purity of art and science. His existence came to my

knowledge by mere accident. A circumstance of a strange and somewhat doubtful nature had caused a great deal of conversation and conjecture, just at the time that I happened to be sojourning in the town. A poor fellow had picked up, from a heap of rubbish in one of the narrowest and most unfrequented streets, a piece of metal, weighing several pounds. He, at first, supposed it to be iron, as it was covered with a thick coat of rust. But even a piece of iron of that weight was no small prize; so he took it home, and began to scrape and scour it very industriously. After some labour he succeeded in getting off the thick crust; and after a little polishing, he began to perceive a yellowish tinge gleaming through the dark brown coat. The brazen serpent of the Hebrews was not probably gazed at with more devotion than this poor fellow gave to what he believed to be the solid lump of brass which his good fortune had thrown before him. He never imagined the possibility of its being *gold*—yet *gold* it was—and, after

various consultations, and many an assaye, *gold* it was universally admitted to be.

The lucky possessor of this treasure having got over his astonishment and his joy, without running wild from their effects; and becoming extremely scrupulous, either through integrity or fear—their operations are very similar—resisted all the overtures of the jewellers and other Jews, and refused to sell his ingot at any price. He resolved on depositing it with the authorities of the town; and accordingly handed it over to the safe keeping of the chief magistrate, who immediately made an official report of the transaction to the Secretary of State for the Home Department. A very considerable deal of useless trouble was taken, in consequence of the minister's orders to find out the real owner of the mysterious ingot, or to trace the true history of its appearance in the public streets. Every effort was ineffectual; no claimant came forward; no evidence appeared; and after some delay, and the strictest investigation, the minister

finally ordered the ingot to be returned to the finder, who, with much praise for his honesty, was pronounced to be the lawful proprietor; and this lucky, but no longer *poor*, fellow, was dismissed to the enjoyment of his most unhoped-for wealth.

For many weeks after this event the heads of the townspeople were almost turned, one way or another. Some looked upwards, some downwards, very many sideways—but few straightforward to their own business, the sure way, notwithstanding, of becoming as rich or richer than their fortunate fellow citizen. Great numbers indulged in the belief that the golden age was fairly returned in solid evidence upon earth. The most vapoury looked to the clouds in hopes of a Danaëan shower; and the least speculative part of the population (that is to say the poorest part of it, for covetousness always goes in a direct ratio with wealth) sifted and searched the most wretched heaps of rags and rubbish, on the

chance of turning up "another, and another, and another."

At length the most rational of the citizens came to the conclusion that this solitary ingot must have lain, time out of mind, concealed in some old house, and upon the demolition of the walls, or the clearing out of the cellars, have been carelessly flung into the street, to become a source of wealth to one man, and of words to thousands. But there were some, and not a few, who indulged another theory on the subject. These good folk—the credulous and marvel-loving—the romantic and rigmarole portion of the community, settled in their own minds, or *imaginations*—we must not confound terms—that "the living alchymist" was the author of all that had happened, that he had at length discovered—

> "The divine secret that doth fly in clouds
> From east to west, and whose tradition
> Is not from men but spirits;"

And that the first fruits of his success was this

identical ingot, thrown thus upon the wide world, like an apple of discord, or bone of contention, to set the population by the ears, and thus revenge himself for the contumely with which he and his studies had been heretofore treated. By this conflict of opinion, and the chance mention of the last cited, I, as any other stranger might, became acquainted with the name and residence of "the cunning man," who, I was assured,—

> "Could extract
> The souls of all things by his art; call all
> The virtues and the miracles of the sun
> Into a temp'rate furnace; and teach dull Nature
> What her own forces are!"

Fancy could not fail to be busy on the subject fresh started for its pursuit, in the very mention of a "living alchymist." No sooner did I bring myself to believe in the fact of the existence of one of these "smoky persecutors of Nature," and had ascertained that he was not an inmate of, or a subject for, a madhouse, than I began to picture him, in all the varieties of

moral and physical construction—his enthusiasm, his abstraction, his ardent looks, his worn out frame, pale cheeks and sunken eye, his picturesque costume, with all the auxiliaries of crucible, furnace, and alembic, and the chaos of elementary confusion associated with his wild pursuit. My mind seemed to fly back for centuries. It appeared to suffer a kind of retrograde transmigration, and to occupy the body of some contemporary of St. Leon; while the splendid combinations of Godwin peopled the actual scene, with the very characters and customs, his breathing pictures of which had been the charm and the magic of my boyhood.

In breathless impatience I approached the alchymist's residence. I was truly and most unaffectedly excited to a state of high *romance*. I was well introduced, and sure of admittance, and a good reception. But the look of the house displeased and disappointed me. I had framed it to myself as Gothic, dark, and desolate. It was a square, modern mansion, plastered and

white-washed, with a green door and brass knocker, in a well-built street, and provokingly clean. I hoped I had made a mistake; but the chubby-cheeked lass, who appeared at my knock, dissipated my doubts, and replied to my inquiry, in unquestionable Flemish, that her master *was* within—and just returned from market.

I gulped down this carnal and undignified intimation; and as I followed the *juffrow* along the narrow and white-washed corridor, I strove to keep awake my rather somnulent sensations of whilome excitement. But I had no time for preparation; for my conductor abruptly threw open the door of a back parlour—and the alchymist stood before me! I literally started back, and my heart sunk—with *what* species of emotion I shall leave to my readers' fancy, after I sketch the object thus suddenly revealed to my astonished observation.

He was a little, pot-bellied, smooth-faced, rosy-gilled old fellow, with grey hair, tied behind in "a round unvarnished" pig-tail. He was

dressed in a brown frock coat, buttoned half-way up, and displaying a chintz waistcoat, a broad-frilled shirt, and a white muslin cravat, tied tight, and terminating under his chin in two large bows and flowing ends. I could not see his breeches, but his stockings were of white cotton with blue stripes, and a huge pair of plated buckles fastened his broad-toed shoes. His face was a dumpling illustration of dulness, to which a simper and a chuckle of ineffable content added their mortifying evidence. I was utterly astounded. The whole fabric of my fancy was blown into the air. Antiquity, chivalry, and magic vanished from around me. Never were the wings of expectancy so closely clipped. The wide ocean of romance, on which I had been afloat, seemed shrunk into the dimensions of a dry dock; and I stood, as it were, with sails tight furled, in the steam-engine reality of boiler and black smoke.

I stared at my alchymist, with a gaze which nothing could have transmuted into politeness.

He returned it by a bow or two; and his little grey eyes twinkled stupidly; and he muttered some civilities in clumsy French. I made a bad return for these attentions, and gave but a sorry specimen of national good breeding. Quite satisfied, though by no means contented, I was about to make a rapid retreat; but my host (without whom, if I may be allowed the *équivoque*, I had so sadly reckoned) was not inclined that I should escape thus easily. His vanity was up in bottle—it had been many a long year fermenting; and was, as I soon found out, hereditary.

"Well, Sir," said he, "you were anxious to see a man whom every one considers a fool?"

"Why, Sir," stammered I, "I confess I was desirous to make the acquaintance of a gentleman whose pursuits are so uncommon—but—"

"Come, come, don't mince matters—you came here to laugh at me."

"Not with that *intention*, I assure you."

"Well, well, never mind—you need not

deny it, if you did; you may laugh as much as you like. Every one laughs at me—but I shall have the cream of the jest by and by—ha! ha! ha!"

"Why, do you really believe that you will ever discover the philosopher's stone?" asked I, my disappointment *fusing* down into amusement, at this vulgar caricature of alchymy and its sublime absurdities.

"That I shall *ever* discover it!" exclaimed he, with a contemptuous vibration of the upper lip, and a chuckle of self-consequence; and wheeling quickly round, and instantly walking out into a little trim-set flower-garden,

"Follow me!—look there!" added he, as soon as we reached the farther end of the *parterre*, and he pointed to half a dozen phials hanging against the wall in a corner, and covered by a glass case. "Look there; do you see that phial? *that* contains the philosopher's stone. The philosopher's stone indeed! *Ever*

discover it! Why, it is nothing—nothing at all—the very first step."

"Indeed!" uttered I. "I confess my ignorance, but I thought the philosopher's stone was the grand secret. But where is it, pray? I see no stone."

"Heaven forbid that you should! No *stone!* Why the *lapis philosophorum*, or philosopher's stone, is not a *stone.*"

"What is it then, may I ask?"

"Why, it's a powder—that red powder that you see there, formed at the bottom of that liquid—that's the philosopher's stone—ha, ha, ha!"

"Then you expect next to be able to make gold?"

"Make gold! why I *can* make gold, and silver too; look at *that* phial—and *that.* What is in the first? Isn't it gold?—and in the other? Isn't it silver? Is there a goldsmith or chemist in the Netherlands that can deny it? But could they *make* it, ha, ha, ha!—not they,

not they, not they!" and with these words he turned abruptly round—a favourite movement of his.

"My good Sir," cried I, catching him at his rebound, as I may say, "you quite astonish me."

"I dare say I do, ha, ha, ha!"

"You do, indeed. What! you possess the philosopher's stone—you can make silver and gold—you have the proofs there in those phials?" and I looked at the dirty white, and the green and yellowish compounds.

"Well, and what of that? I tell you the philosopher's stone is *nothing*—and my gold and silver is not worth a brass farthing."

"How—what—why? I don't understand you."

"Why, because my gold is not solid—it wouldn't stand *fusion*—it would evaporate and fly up the chimney; and that red powder, the *lapis philosophorum* can't make better. It is the *transmuting* powder I want. Do you under-

stand that? Not the powder that can only make such pitiful gold as this—although it is the *purest* that can be made of its kind, and many a man would think half a century of toil well repaid by being able to make it; but I want the powder that can change base metals *into* gold—that's what I want; and what, with the blessing of Heaven, I am in a fair way of having."

"And that grand result may happen at any moment?"

"Ay, at the very moment we are talking of it, the purchase of the globe and eternal life may be mine—ha, ha, ha!"

"You must work hard for all this, Sir," said I; "I should like to see your laboratory."

"See my laboratory! you do see it. There it is—this is it," said he, pointing to the corner where hung the phials; and opening out his hands, to express, as I thought, that he worked in the open air, but he undeceived me immediately, continuing—

"Work hard! I don't work *at all*—ha, ha,

ha!" and once more he wheeled briskly round on his own pivot.

"Who works *for* you, then!" asked I.

"Nature—the climate—the Heavens—the sun and moon—the seven planets—*they* are my workmen."

"And do you really think they understand their trade?" said I, smiling.

"Understand their trade! *Pardi!* to be sure they do. What makes these flowers to grow in the earth? these trees to put forth their shoots and blossoms? cannot the power and the agents that do that, make gold and silver generate in these phials?"

To this unanswerable argument, I felt no inclination to reply.

"Does it take a long time," asked I, "to form this powder into gold?"

"Seven months—a month for each planet."

"But although you have not arrived at the grand secret, you know how to go about it? you know the matters requisite?"

"Yes, I think I do, ha, ha, ha! The four elements—any fool may know that. But how to put them together! there's the point, ha, ha, ha!" and round he spun once more.

"You must have burned a good deal of charcoal in this pursuit," said I, laughing outright.

"Not a single bit," replied he, with his usual chuckle; "but my father burned about four thousand bushels of it."

"Did your father follow the same trade?"

"Ay, for sixty years. He beggared himself by it, and was at last blown up by the explosion of a retort. But he knew nothing—he was a mere child—he went on the wrong track—he worked with *fire*, and left behind him a heap of ashes, that could as soon make mutton as gold. My ancestors have spent centuries in the science."

"Your family is an ancient one?"

"I believe it is indeed, ha, ha, ha! Follow me," and round he whisked, and walked straight

into the house. I followed as desired, and stopped when he stopped, before a huge genealogical *ocean*, hung up against the wall of the corridor. It was bedaubed in all the corners with coats of arms, heraldic bearings, and hieroglyphical devices, and looked dirty enough to have been drawn in the dark ages.

"Stand upon that table," said he, "and just look at the *first*, the topmost name, close to the ceiling. Stay, stop a minute—put this chair upon the table—now up with you—look sharp, and tell me if mine is an ancient family. I should like to know your opinion, ha, ha, ha!" and he thus ran on, murmuring rather to himself than to me, while I mounted the very ricketty pedestal, and was somewhat repaid for the trouble and risk, by a new proof of human littleness, in reading, in old misshapen characters, the name "Augustus Cæsar." I descended, and saw the twinkle of pedigree-pride in the old man's eye, and the nervous curl that shook his lip. I made him the very low bow which

he seemed to expect, and I heartily wished at the moment that he possessed the essence of philosophy rather than the *stone.*

"Your favourite study must have cost you years of reading," said I, looking at the dusty shelves, which were bent down with heaps of old books, in most unsightly bindings, and many of them in "High Dutch," which the readers of my motto already know to have been Adam's language.

"Yes, yes, it has required some application," replied the Alchymist, "but I might have read for ever, in the way my ancestors did, and, like them, not have been a bit the wiser. All these volumes, and thousands more, have been written on the hermetic science; but the whole secret might be traced on a paper, the size of your thumb nail—what do you think of that?"

"In fact, it lies in a nut-shell?" said I.

"Yes, but who can *crack* the shell, ha, ha, ha?" chuckled he; "ay, you might read to

eternity, and not understand one single sentence without you possessed the key."

"And pray how is that to be procured?"

"The way I procured it—the way the whole race of philosophers who have known the secret procured it—the way any man *may* procure it, but in which no other perhaps ever will procure it—the way by which religion enters the heart—the way the prophets procured their power—the way in which God speaks to his creatures, and in which man may know his Creator—by *inspiration!*"

"Enough, enough, Sir!" exclaimed I, "spare yourself and me any further explanation: I now understand the nature and value of your science completely. I thank you cordially for your frankness—I wish you all happiness and superhuman success; for you have taught me a new lesson in the wide book of nature, and I will do my best to profit by it. Good morning to you, Sir.—Farewell!"

With these words, and a reciprocal profusion of bowings and scrapings, we made our way, he forwards, and I backwards, to the street door, which he insisted on opening, and I made a point of closing; glad to shut, within the atmosphere of his own absurdity, a visionary unfit for the rational intercourse of life.

But the reader will, perhaps, be surprised to hear that this visit made a strong impression upon me. I cannot reasonably account for such an effect, produced by so contemptible a cause, for nothing could have been more effectually destructive of every imaginative illusion, connected with the wild secrets of Alchymy, and all their exciting associations. Yet I could no more restrain, than reason with the feeling that made me dwell on the insipid enthusiast—if I *must* profane the appellation by giving it to him —and on the pursuit over which *his* devotion threw so degraded a stain. So it was, however, and I am almost ashamed to confess that I followed an idle impulse, which led me for several

days, to look out in the old libraries of Belgium, for works that treat of the Hermetic Philosophy.

I lost some precious time in wading through a mass of authorship, that gave me but little entertainment, and still less instruction, but which, nevertheless, *led me on.* I worked like a machine to which the impetus was given, no matter how or by whom. But I shall not repine if, by my testimony to the utter worthlessness of the study, even as an amusement, I may prevent others from a like infatuation. The *most* inquisitive may be satisfied to remain in ignorance of the divine art or *science*—for its profoundest professors do not know which to designate it—and may leave in the dusty repose of some mouldering collection, the whole of the writers, from Hermes Trismegistus, the Egyptian, down to the Abbé Lenglet du Fresnoy.

It would be of little comfort to the curious to know (as I do) whether the double mercury of Trevisan, or the mixture of mercury with gold of Basil Valentine, was the material most

approved of, to waste the time and wear out the wits of the phantom followers. I am sure no one would thank me for communicating the knowledge, so dearly earned, and so soon to be forgotten, as to the relative merits of essences, bodies, metals, alkalis, and vegetables, for the chances of forming the real projecting powder or *lapis philosophorum*, or for detailing the disputes of Father Kircher with about a dozen of the "philosophers," in which the renowned Jesuit proved himself a perfect ass, by thinking it necessary to *prove* that his adversaries were the same.

Who, either, would desire a detail of the experiments of Arnoldus de Villanova at Rome, in the thirteenth century; of Raymond Lully in England, in the fourteenth; of Gustenhover of Strasbourg, and Dubois in France, somewhat later?—or be interested in the facts of Louis XIII. Gustavus Adolphus, and John, Prince of Mirandola, having countenanced this humbug, or, as some say, believed in it; or of its being

sadly goaded by, and tossed upon, the horns of Pope John the XXIId's most violent Bull?

All the stores of information I have procured on these heads may be very quietly bonded and warehoused, as food too nauseous and unpalatable for even the craving appetite of the present generation. But I cannot resist giving one extract (as a fair specimen of all that has been written on the subject) from a work, that, in the estimation of the initiated, hangs on the very topmost branch of the tree of knowledge. It bears the modest title of "The Sum of Perfection," and owns for its author a most renowned Arabian philosopher and alchymist called Geber, who, some centuries back, received the *inspiration*, and discovered the grand secret. The passage which I am about to transcribe, may have lost some of its spirit in a double translation, but I dare say *the sense* is pretty well preserved. It is the last chapter of "The Sum of Perfection," and I only regret that I did not

begin to read the book Chinese-ways—for if I had, *my* readers may believe, I would not have gone *further*.

"CHAPTER THE LAST.

"Of the manner in which the author has taught the art.

"To remove all sort of pretext on which my calumniators could accuse me of duplicity, or of not having spoken with full frankness in this treatise, I do declare, in the first place, that I have not attempted to teach the *science* consecutively or with studied form, but have dispersed my instructions here and there, in divers chapters of the work. And I did this *on purpose*, because had I put them in a regular way, and one after another, the wicked (who would have made a bad use of their knowledge) would have learned quite as easily as the well disposed; *easier*, perhaps, as the devil would have no doubt prompted his children.*

* *Si plura dicerem etiam pueri intelligerent*—if more were said, even children might understand it—was a favourite phrase of the "Philosophers."

"I declare, in the second place, that in every part of this treatise where it appears that I have spoken the plainest and the most openly of the science, it is just there that I have spoken the most obscurely. I have not, notwithstanding, spoken any where by allegories or enigmas; but I have treated my subject in plain and intelligible language, having written with sincerity, and in the way I was taught by the inspiration of God, the most mighty, most glorious, and above all praise, who deigned to reveal it to me; it being he alone than can give it, and take it back, to whom and when he pleases.

"Hold up, then, Children of Science! Do not despair of obtaining the power to learn this marvellous secret! For I promise you faithfully that you will infallibly discover it, if you seek it, not by the aid of reason, or of any other science, but by ardour and impetuosity of mind!

"Whoever will seek it by the natural intelligence and enlightenment of his understanding, he shall find it. But he who would expect to

learn it in books need not hope to acquire it without long study. For I protest that neither the philosophers who have preceded me, nor I myself, have written one sentence but for our own information, and that of the philosophers and adepts who shall succeed us, and not *in the least* for others.

"As for myself, although I have written in the self same way, I can nevertheless say that I have not said what I have said merely to excite the shrewd and sensible to study this sublime science, but that I have said quite enough to give them the means of seeking the secret by the only true method. Moreover, I can pledge myself that whoever will apply diligently, and with good heart, to understand what I have said in this book, will assuredly have the pleasure of discovering a very great gift at the hands of the Most High.

" And that is all I have to say, touching the study of an *art*, or a *science*, so renowned and very excellent."

The reader will no doubt be struck with some passages in this mass of jargon, resembling a higher order of jugglery; but *this* is enough to deal with at present.

Like the Indian sage, who reduced the library of the king his master, from a hundred camel loads of books into *four sentences;* or a cook, who boils down a basket of spinage into a saucerful; I have stewed all my Alchymical information into this—that "the sublime science,"' was, at its best, but a study fitting a mere bubble, to burst at the first prick of common sense, whose worthiest motto, *intellige si potes*, best designates its meaning—a game of "catch me who can!"

Yet, reader, recollect that there lives one man who firmly believes in *all*, and he is within the reach of any one who will take the trouble to *find* him.

THE

TRAPPISTS OF CATSBERG.

On the very borders of France and Belgium, and so completely "debateable," that the inhabitants scarcely know to which nation they belong, there is a cluster of hills, which, in that flat country, are considered as mountains of no ordinary importance. There are six or seven of them, each a few hundred feet high, and differing so little in that particular, and in their general features, that it is evident that Mother Earth threw them from her at one birth.

After crossing the western division of Belgium, from north to south, without seeing any spot of land higher than a mole-hill; travelling over a portion of Nature's face, so smooth that one longs for a wart or two, as beauty-spots rather than disfigurements—it is delightful to catch the swelling aspect of these frontier hills, and to mark something rising between you and the heretofore unbroken circle of the horizon.

I never saw a *mountain*, or indeed a hill of almost any height, that I did not feel an inclination to climb it. The group of elevations now before me could not fail strongly to excite this propensity, if it were merely from their contrast with the monotonous insipidity I had left behind me. But they are in themselves extremely picturesque, well wooded, and broken into abrupt varieties of landscape. They appeared most tempting; but I never was less able to gratify my own wish, or explore their beauties. From circumstances of no importance to the reader, but of infinite moment to the

writer—so passing is the intercourse between *intimates* of three volumes standing—I was at the time little master of my limbs. They took advantage of a long illness to shake off my authority, and refused to obey *me*, although quite unable to shift for themselves. The consequence was, that I was, for exercise sake, obliged to have recourse to those machines formerly described, the village cabriolets; and at the time I speak of, I was seated in the right hand corner of one of the very worst of them, the driver occupying, according to custom, the left. But this was a very different sort of personage from those of the same profession, of whom I have previously given a sketch. It was no other in fact than the old woman, the proprietor of the vehicle, who, while her regular charioteer was shivering in a fit of the low country fever, took his office upon herself; and after first driving a hard bargain with me for the price (to get her hand in practice) she scrambled up by the wheel, and settled herself

beside me, and off we jolted for a couple of leagues, I did not care in what direction; but chance led us towards the *mountains.*

There never was a more unsociable couple than we were for the first league. No communication of any kind intruded on the vacancy which separated us, for I kept myself so remote as to give full elbow room to her whip hand. But, notwithstanding the space, not a word, even, passed between us; exchange, in that particular, was much below par. She was, in fact, repulsive to the last degree—an evident skin-flint, without one element of good fellowship, with that nut-cracker countenance which bespeaks asperity, and a look so sour that it would have been worth a waggon load of vinegar to Hannibal, when he cut his way through the Alps. She was so taciturn as not even to mutter a sound to her old grey mare, that shook its scanty tail at her sometimes—reproachfully, I thought.

We had thus silently and unsociably pro-

ceeded, until we came to the very base of the hills, which gradually displayed their secret recesses as we approached. A little village was visible, about a quarter of a league before us, close to the foot of one of them; and, as the road began to slope gently upwards, the paces of the old grey mare were successively changed, from a trot to an amble, and from an amble to a walk. The old grey woman, consequently, first loosened her loose hold, then placed her whip in the corner beside her, next threw the reins on the animal's neck, and finally flung herself back in the carriage, took a pinch of snuff, offered me another, and began to talk.

"Aha!—good—so far, so well! now we may take it easily. Go along, my lass, at your own pace; your legs and my arms may rest themselves; and well they require it, after near two leagues driving at such a rate."

So much of her conversation was addressed to herself and her mare. She paused for a while, then pulled from her pocket a long clasp knife,

and took up from the straw at the bottom of the vehicle an old pocket-handkerchief, which contained a feed of oats and beans ready mixed. Safely shrined within the corn, and wrapped in a fold of dirty paper, were some thick slices of brown bread and butter, and several layers of cold fat pork; forming altogether a display of sandwiches most solidly disgusting. As my companion offered me one of these, her rigid features relaxed into a smile, which was a mixture of sweet and acid, as nauseous as a cough emulsion. I declined the proffered dainties, and saw her, without the least degree of envy, mumble through the greater part of the repast, and wash it down with a dose of beer, from a broad-bottomed bottle which lay in the cabriolet pocket. These stimulants of solid and fluid produced a powerful effect on my companion, for she became all at once as loquacious as she had been taciturn; and her conversation turned, luckily for my wishes, on the objects which began so much to excite my attention.

"Well, Sir, here we are among the mountains, and a hard pull my poor beast will have of it, to get as far as the village yonder. I don't know what demon made me take this road, instead of going straight along the level causeway. But here we are—there's no use in repining; and we shall have down-hill work going back. So cheer up, Sir; I promise you a draught of new milk, some fresh bread and butter at the village, a repast which some folks may prefer to cold pork and bottled beer. To your better health, mynheer!" and she quaffed the dregs of her bottle of froth.

"Do you know the names of these hills?" asked I.

"To be sure I do. It would be odd if I didn't know the hills, where I lived so long, and where my poor husband immortalized himself."

"A hero, by Jupiter!" thought I, and I listened in fixed attention.

"Yes, I do indeed know them," continued

the dame, "and so shall you, if you wish it. There, right before us, is Rosenberg, so called from the bloody murders that stained its soil deep red, after the battle of Cassel, a thousand years ago, between the men of Bruges and Julius Cæsar, or the Duke of Alva, I don't know which, but my poor man could have told you all about it, as it's often he told it me, lone woman that I am. There's Scarpenberg, high and stiff, and rocky, like its name; and Zwartenberg, as black as the devil himself, that used to sit on the top of it in former times, and watch the hermits rooting their caves in the earth, long before the Benedictine monastery was pulled down, and the villain monks massacred by the people, with my own good man, Peter Zannekills, for their leader—for which good deed, Heaven rest his soul, Amen! Then here, close to us, is Catsberg—"

"By your leave, dame," said I; "before you go further, pray tell me the particular causes that led to the deed you mention."

"You must not have much knowledge, if you are yet to learn one of the most gallant acts of history," replied she, with a vivacity that set every muscle of her face in action, and a curl of contempt on lip and nostril, which gave a most unsightly twist to her gray mustachios. "Yes," continued she, "I believe every one knows that the Benedictines who last roosted in the old convent on Swartzenberg, were killed to a man, and their sinful nest pulled about their ears, every stone of it; as you may see, from the foundation ruins lying bare there before you, down to the very cellar floors, where their miserable victims were entrapped."

Confessing my ignorance of all this, with a most appeasing humility, and shewing no disposition to doubt her statements of geology or chronology, the old woman proceeded to a somewhat lengthy detail of the atrocities vulgarly attributed to the Benedictine confraternity. Among others, the popular belief has stamped their memory with that of inveigling all the pretty

females of the neighbourhood to a certain part of the monastery, where a trap-door immediately opened under their feet, and they were safely precipitated, I forget how many fathoms deep, into caverns where every luxury but fresh air and day-light was provided by the lascivious monks. There the hapless victims were doomed to linger, till premature decay withered their youthful bloom, when they were successively put to death by the impious priests, to whose brutal embraces they had been doomed. The fruits of their intercourse were instantly destroyed; for no sooner had each miserable mother given birth to a child, than it was torn from her arms, and she was thus robbed of all that lighted the cavern solitude with a ray of hope. The whole country was thus kept for some years in a state of ferment, and to use the words of my informant, "a pretty woman became as scarce an animal on the skirts of Swartzenberg, as a wild cat in the woods of Catsberg, ever since Paul

Scoonen, the hunter, was employed to destroy them at five guilders a score."

At length a most tragical catastrophe put an end to the career of monkish villainy. One of the victims (a married woman) escaped by some miracle which I could scarcely comprehend. She fled at night to her own cottage door, and almost frightened her husband to death by her unexpected appearance, her ghastly looks, and altered form. She briefly recounted the story of her captivity and sufferings; told how she was led along by a prowling priest, at the close of the evening, when she had wandered rather far from home in search of a goat that straggled from its pasture; how the reverend father coaxed her on into the convent bounds, and finally to the room from which she was suddenly plunged down into the abyss; how her two babes, born in these dungeons, never saw the light, being unmercifully strangled by their *very* reverend fathers; and how, after a captivity of nearly three years, she eluded their vigilance and escaped.

"How happy the man must have been in recovering his wife!" exclaimed I, in my innocence.

"That he might well be!" replied she, with a self-sufficient toss of her old head.

"And what did the husband do?" asked I.

"Why, he kissed his pretty wife, God bless him! gave thanks to Heaven, stuck a knife in his leathern belt, took his bill-hook in one hand, and a blazing fagot in the other; then roused the neighbourhood, and was the first to set the monastery in flames, and commenced the butchery by cutting the prior's throat!"

"But you forget, my good dame, having told me that your own husband took the lead in this pious business."

"And who dares deny it? Was not Peter Zannekills my husband?—and didn't I go with him hand in hand, and stand by him to the last, till the whole pile fell in, and buried the very memory of the villain that ruined me?"

"What, then, were *you* the pretty woman in question?—*you* the wife that the man thanked Heaven for sending back to him?"

"Yes, Mynheer, I was; and for thirty years afterwards he had the blessing of a faithful helpmate to repay him for his three year of divorce; and he only parted from me, on his death-bed, in the hope that I might—"

"Live many a long day after him?"

"Exactly so, Mynheer."

"What a shocking sight the burning ruins and the murdered priests must have presented!" exclaimed I.

"Yes, they did; but a sight that did one good! It was fine to see lust and cruelty weltering in blood and flame! But it was a sad spectacle, indeed, to watch the ghastly women, as they fled from the caverns half wild with fright and joy, and fainting from the fresh air rushing upon them too suddenly! But never mind looking back to these dead monks, while you have plenty of living Trappists to stare at

here on Catsberg. Heaven preserve me! if there isn't one of them close by!—*two*, as I am a sinner! Let us get on from this lonely place —I would not trust myself within reach of them for the world!"

While she whipped the old mare into something approaching an amble, once more I could not resist a smile at her anxiety, which might have suited with the circumstances of forty years before; and taking for granted her reports of her former charms, I gave a passing thought to the fragile nature of personal beauty, and wondered if any youthful fair one could see the anticipated reflection of her loveliness in the face of this old crone, or value her own bloom the less, from the prospect of what it might become.

In the mean time I kept a strict eye on the two trappists; and curiosity absorbed reflection, speculation, and philosophy. The faces of these men were turned from the road, as they were employed watching three or four cows that grazed in a pasture on the hill side. The figures

were enveloped in brown cassocks, with cowls pulled over each head; and nothing more was visible but two sturdy and naked pair of legs, as they strode through the furze and heath. I perceived that they wore shoes, but no other object of dress was visible. I could not ascertain whether or not they had discovered our approach; but they seemed to turn their backs most scornfully either on us or the world.

We soon reached the little village, which was one of those neatly built, sequestered spots that seem made for the enjoyment of what is most amiable as well as most humble in life. There were but two or three houses that exceeded one story in height, and these had no pretensions over the others but in a few feet elevation. A pretty girl received us at the inn, more blooming than the large tulip (a favourite sign in the Netherlands) which was painted over the door. A limping ostler hobbled out to assist my old woman in *unroping* the mare; while the girl, (whose name might have been Hebe)

handed me a glass of delicious new milk, which her smiles seemed to convert into that of "human kindness" itself. Seated on the stone bench, in front of the house, I finished my draught, and eat with it a roll of the very best bread I ever tasted, in Belgium or out of it, and butter that merited as pretty an imprint as the pretty face of her who had made it. While I was thus employed, the old mare munched her mixture in the portable manger which stood at the door; and the old woman dispatched the remnant of her sandwiches with a rapidity that proved her teeth to have bid defiance to time.

I looked upon the hill which rose high above the village, and distinguished its barren sides, through the veil of smoke wreathing upwards in the light breeze that had scarcely power enough to stir a leaf or a blade of grass. On the brow of the hill some straggling cottages appeared, and beyond them, on the very summit, stood, (as I was told,) the monastery of the Trappists.

Rousing all my strength of resolution and *muscle*, and grasping firmly my trusty stick, which had ere then aided me up acclivities somewhat higher than that I now contemplated, I proposed to a gaping youth, who seemed to have nothing better to do, to guide me by the easiest path to the high point of my ambition, and the very highest, I believe, of his knowledge. A piece of ten cents sealed our bargain; and I set out, vigorously leaning on the lad, and followed by many cautions from my old woman, "to take care of myself, and look out sharply for trap-doors."

I never felt more thoroughly the inspiring influence of air and exercise. At every upward step, I seemed to throw a load of fatigue and languor down the hill. My limbs became elastic, my spirits light, and I felt stronger and younger than I had been for months before. I now and then paused for repose; but by the time I reached the top, I only halted for the purpose of enjoying the view: and it was

really worth enjoying. A wide extent of landscape spread around, but it seemed secluded and *domestic.* The two or three towns in sight did not look as if they were gone a visiting, like those seen in the mist from loftier eminences; but gave a notion of home and quietness, calm enjoyments, and social circles. The prospect was bounded, at a reasonable extent, by rising grounds and woods; and the highest object was Mount Cassel, standing in single pride, and looking far over the heads of all the other elevations in my view. I could not help giving this hill somewhat more than its due share of veneration, as I marked its pre-eminence; and I thought that men might take example from mountains, and understand the value of standing *alone.* The group around me are lost in a common confusion to the gazer from Mount Cassel, merely because they *are* a group. Had each stood singly out from its fellows, in originality and independence, each might have gained its separate share of admiration, and have

attracted in its turn the very same degree of respect that I now gave to another, no higher nor better than they.

"There, Sir, is the monastery," said my guide, as soon as he caught my eye turned in the proper direction.

"The monastery!" exclaimed I, in surprise, at seeing, instead of the gloomy building one associates with the name, a modern house, white-washed and cheerful-looking, stretching along the extent of a handsome garden, smiling in sunshine, and the absolute contrast to aught morose, or dull. Looking over a hedge, which was the only enclosure to an extensive yard in the rear of the house, I observed close to it two of the trappists, industriously working with carpenter's tools. A little farther off, two or three more were busily employed in spreading out some newly washed linen; others moved about, variously occupied, and all wore the same coarse and characteristic costume as those I had first encountered. Some of the fellows I now gazed

at were of most ferocious aspect, with bushy beards and scowling brows; and I thought I was coming into contact with felony's picked men.

I moved round the garden hedge, and reached a small door at the other side, which my guide informed me was the entrance to the place. I accordingly rang the bell. The door was immediately opened; and a figure stood before me, of an aspect totally different from those I had previously seen. It was that of a young man, beardless almost, of fair and mild complexion and demeanour, dressed in a robe of white drugget, his cowl thrown back, and discovering a head with hair so closely cut as to appear as if recently shaved, all but a circular rim of about half an inch broad just above the ears, which struck me as an impious imitation of the halo usually represented in painting close above the heads of saints.

The young man made me a low obeisance, with arms crossed on his breast, and he demanded, in Flemish, what was the object of my

visit? I replied, in French, that I wished to see an establishment so interesting, and hoped I might be permitted to indulge my curiosity. He bowed assent, and led the way to the house. I followed, the guide at my heels, cap in hand, nd looking awfully respectful to every thing we approached.

We first entered a small square parlour on the ground floor, of which a few common articles composed the furniture; but all were extremely neat, and I found one of the rush-bottomed, cherry-backed chairs as luxurious a resting-place as a couch of velvet, had I been visiting a palace: such is the advantage of *things* being in keeping with *places*.

The chamberlain left me for a few minutes, most probably to "report progress" to his superior, for the prior himself soon made his appearance. He was an extremely good-looking man of about forty, dressed like those I had first observed, with the exception of his head being covered by a close leather cap, and the brown

cloth of his robe being of a texture not so coarse. After a short conversation, I proceeded, under the direction of the reverend ciceroné, who waited outside, to examine the remainder of the house, beginning with the little chapel, which was very plain, having none of the disagreeable pomp of Catholic churches in general. We next walked through the narrow corridors, on each side of which were ranged the little cellular divisions, where the monks went through the mockery of repose; for there can be little of its comfortable reality in the four hours' rest snatched between eight o'clock and midnight, when they rise again to pray and chaunt, without changing an article of their clothing from morning till night, or night till morning. Their very shirts of coarse horse-hair, are worn for a fortnight together. The beds on which they lie down are most ingeniously uncomfortable, being too short for even a common-sized man, and I have no doubt but their possessors often wish for a couch of the Procrustes fashion, with *one-half*

the capabilities of his celebrated machine. A scanty rug covers the straw on which these self-tormentors stretch themselves; and no other furniture of any kind adorns their cells, the dimensions of which do not exceed six feet square. A small aperture is cut in each door, to admit a literal *mouthful* of air, and on each is inscribed the name of its occupant, "Brother Francis," "Brother Ambrose," "Brother Symphorien," "Brother Placidus," and so on.

We next visited the refectory, where a table was laid for about forty. Beside each plate, of the coarsest earthen ware, was a mug of the same material, about the size of a small drinking glass. These were filled with beer; a scanty bit of brown bread was beside each plate; a still smaller portion of cheese; and I found that these, with an undressed sallad and a soup made of water, onions, potatoes, and parsley, composed the entire repast. But it must be observed, that at the period of my visit the Trappists were living *well*. They had bread

and milk for breakfast, besides the dinner luxuries which I have enumerated; but they never eat meat, poultry, or even fish. On the first of October their Lent of *nine months* was to commence; and during the whole of that time they allow themselves but one meal a day, excluding totally the indulgences of milk and beer, and wholly living (if it can be called so) on vegetables, bread, and water. In every room the word "SILENCE" was painted on the wall, and I figured to myself these unsocial Cenobites, placed at their lonely board, and, in the coarse, though scanty indulgence of appetite, discarding these convivial accessories which raise eating men above grazing brutes. But the whole system of Trappism goes to degrade mankind to its lowest possible level. Beggary, needless filth of person, perpetual silence, (except to the few who must use their tongues to keep their commerce open with the world) seem the fundamental principles of the order. They herd together for no conceivable purpose that might not be

effected by each man singly, and by thus congregating they give a scope to imagination, or malignity, for odious imputations, which after all may have no reality in them.

Yet I could not help viewing these monks with a species of compassion that approached to what might be called interest. Whatever may have been the excesses of bigotry or crime that have forced these men into such an asylum, the life they lead is indisputably one of wretchedness. Whatever their sins, the penance is equivalent. For what misery can exceed that of the closest intercourse, without the least *society*, with one's fellow men; the mind condemned to wallow in the mire of its own dark thoughts, with constant yearnings to unburthen itself; a companion, perhaps for years, at the very elbow of each wretch, only wanting the interchange of *one word* to become intimate, confiding, and compassionate—and that word forbidden; to move about, each man a breathing automaton, heart, feelings, and faculties, all

under interdict? I say nothing of their personal austerities—but let me be of any order save that of La Trappe—fasting and praying, as long as nature and the brain can be kept on the stretch, flagellated daily, hourly if the vows demand it, so as thought is free to vent itself in speech, so as the healing intercourse of friendship be allowed, even at the risk of confidence leading to disappointment! The best fate that awaits the Trappist is, that he cannot live long, and that the intellect is worn out, ere the body sinks under the wasting sufferings to which it is doomed.

Wishing to examine the details of the place more closely than this hasty morning visit allowed, I readily accepted the invitation of the prior to spend a day or two in the monastery, a custom prescribed towards all strangers, a law of hospitality that is sure to meet its recompense. I accordingly sent back my garçon guide, with a message to my old woman, that she might return alone, sending me, the following morning,

a change of those articles of dress, which even the example of my hosts could not induce me to dispense with.

I was soon served, in the little square parlour, with a very good dinner of flesh and fowls, cheese, eggs, beer, wine, and all that was calculated at once to satisfy and astonish the traveller. I only wondered what became of the *remains*, or how the supply of the larder was disposed of, when no claimant like myself consumed its resources. I, however, asked no such questions. I slept in a neat bed, with tolerably fine linen, and in a chamber altogether such as might content any reasonable visitor.

During the day I walked about the garden and on the hill, conversing with the prior, and also with the almoner, who indulged most freely in his privilege of speech. He was a young fellow under five-and-twenty, good-looking, loquacious, jovial; and he seemed well qualified for his office of managing the household affairs, and seeking abroad for resources

which he aided to consume at home. The offices of almoner and begging brother are united, and are by no means sinecures, as I was afterwards convinced.

I attended the afternoon service in the chapel, and saw a remarkable display of close-cropped heads, apparent humility, and the externals of devotion. There were many common-place, and *some* marked countenances among the monks who chaunted the service; and these were uniformly habited in a white robe, with a black stripe down the back; the heads close trimmed, with the exception of the circle I before described. They were almost all young men, and evidently of an order superior to the coarse and brown-clad brethren who worked at the menial offices. In what form of gregarious intercourse can perfect equality exist, since there is, even among Trappists, a privileged class? But it is, after all, questionable which is the aristocracy here—whether the psalmodist, who performs no manual labour, has not a still

harder task, in a seven hour's daily attendance in the chapel, aiding the hoarse discords of his brother choristers. Among the latter I was particularly struck with the positive air of consumptive delicacy in their faces and hands, and the remarkable development, in many of the heads, of that elevation which phrenologists pronounce to be the organ of *veneration.* There was not a prominent forehead among them. There were a very old man and a young one, who were fit figures for sculptor or painter--the young man, particularly, was one of the finest expressions of resigned and pious beauty that I ever contemplated; and I have him before me as I write, in his fixed posture, with folded arms, and eyes neither cast upwards nor downwards, in assumed devotion or false piety, and the hectic flushings that passed at times across his pale and sunken cheek.

During my visit I acquired a good deal of information as to the habits and rules of this remarkable order; and I was disabused of some

errors which I had formerly entertained; among others were the vulgar notion, that the Trappists never change any article of dress till it literally rots on the back; and that a part of their daily duty is, to go through the ceremony of digging their own graves. Cause enough exists, without having recourse to such exaggerations, to make the system of La Trappe eminently objectionable to those whose principles are opposed to monachism in all its branches. A few of the peculiar rules of this order have been mentioned. The most obviously repulsive to good sense, which it possesses in common with others, is that of being wholly subsisted by beggary; for any little appearance of industry among its votaries is confined to offices of household necessity, which they certainly would not perform could they find any others fools enough to save them the trouble. A few words on the subject of Monkish mendicity may be not amiss here.

Of nearly one hundred monastic orders in the

church of Rome, upwards of thirty live by charity; "without any obligation," as they say, "to work, either corporeally or spiritually, for their own support. For participating the sovereignty of God in the empire of the universe, they have the right to live at the public cost, without doing any thing but what they please."*

It is, however, clear that St. Francis, the author of the begging system, had no intention that it should reach the state of corruption it soon acquired. His principle is thus laid down: "Those brothers to whom God has given the ability to do it, will labour faithfully, so as to avoid idleness, without injuring the spirit of prayer; and as a recompense, their bodily wants will be relieved; they and their brethren joining humility to poverty; but *they must not take money.* The brethren must have nothing of their own, neither house, land, nor other possessions; but considering themselves as strangers

* This exposition of monkish insolence is to be found in a curious book called, "Les heureux succès de la Piété."

in this world, they will go on with confidence, asking charity."

But these rigid principles of their founder did not suit even the earliest Franciscans; for four years after his death, in 1230, they obtained from Pope Gregory IX. a bull which freed them from the obligation of strictly observing his testament. And thus "manual labour, so well practised by the original monks, became odious; and mendicity, formerly odious, became honourable."

In about half a century after the death of St. Francis, his followers grew intolerably presumptuous, importunate, and idle. So much so, that several of the bishops loudly declaimed against them. Under pretext of asking charity, these

* The following passage from St. Bonaventure is cited by Voltaire, in his Philosophical Dictionary:—

"These begging brothers, by their vagabond life, scandalize in place of edifying. Their importunity in demanding makes people afraid to encounter them, as if they were but robbers. Indeed, this importunity is a species of violence, which few can resist, and particularly when it comes from those whose very

begging brothers mixed themselves up in all sorts of affairs, private and public; entering into the most secret concerns of a family, or obtaining deputations to negociate treaties between states and sovereigns ;* and finally, it was to them that was owing the establishment of the Inquisition.

The society on Catsberg is a branch of a great Trappist establishment in France. It was founded a few years back, by a painter of some celebrity, called Ruyssen, whose generosity took this singular channel for indulgence. He made a free grant to these monks of the house they inhabit, and a considerable portion of the land which surrounds it. The latter is not at pre-

dress demands respect. But it is, in fact, the natural consequence of mendicity; for the beggar must live. Hunger and other pressing wants conquer the natural modesty of even the well educated; and once that this barrier is passed over, each considers it a merit and an honour to have more success than another in collecting alms."

* Abbé Hussey, a Trappist, was a celebrated diplomatic intriguer between several European courts, about the latter end of the last century.

sent of much value, the soil being poor, and requiring more industry to make it productive than belongs to its present possessors. But the gift was generous, however its object might have been ill-chosen; and the monks have not only granted, as is supposed, an equivalent in heaven for this earthly donation, but the suspicion is abroad that they hastened the journey of their patron from this world to the next, to give him more speedy possession. Soon after the painter made his will, securing the bequest, he died suddenly; and the general inference is, that the Trappists were resolved to secure their succession against any possible caprice on the part of their benefactor. One would hope that this is a calumny. The will was, I understand, contested by some of his relatives; and the monks were deprived of a considerable share of the bequest, but confirmed in possession of the part they now enjoy.

Catsberg has, from the earliest times, been the favourite resort of Anchorites, who, before the

French revolution, covered the hill. Soon after the establishment of the new order of things, (which means, I fear, a return to *the old*,) á few of the *Frères Barbettes*, or, as they are more commonly called, the *Ignorantins*, took possession of the hill, and commenced their course of religious *enlightenment* and political *endarkenment*, neither of which received any encouragement from the neighbouring inhabitants, whose eyes had been opened too widely during a quarter of a century, to endure the *glare*, or be satisfied with the *gloom*. The ignorant instructors were consequently induced to abandon their position; and they were succeeded by the Trappists, who, in no way interfering with those around them, are tolerated, but by no means popular; and from being at first objects of curiosity, are now only subjects for contempt.

My guide up the hill appeared at my bedside soon after day-break the following morning, bringing me the refreshments I had requested from my old hostess. I rose early; eat a hearty

breakfast of excellent materials; gave what I thought a fair return for my entertainment; made my adieus to the prior, and accepted the almoner's offer to accompany me down the hill, to meet the cabriolet which waited for me at the village below.

My animated and talkative companion entered into most fluent explanations on every point of my inquiries; and with as much freedom as on any other, into the particulars of his own situation.

"What a happy life must yours be, in contrast with that of your secluded brethren," said I.

"Why, yes, Sir, it is: thanks to Heaven it is so, for *me*—but I have not enjoyed it long. I am the successor of another, even in the short time that our community has been formed here; and perhaps if you knew *his* story, you would acknowledge that the situation of begging brother is not one so desirable, or so free from worldly dangers as you now suppose."

"Perhaps not. But to enable me to form a

just opinion on the point, you will probably tell me your predecessor's story ?"

The hint was sufficient. It was no sooner thrown out, than my companion acted upon it. He not only walked down to the village, but he joined in my drive; and did not quit me till he had partaken of my dinner in the old woman's *auberge*, at the cross roads leading to Bailleul and Roussebrugge. When we separated in the evening, as he returned to his monastery, I put something into his leathern purse, slightly adding to the funds of his society, and still more insufficiently recompensing his loss of time, and paying for the information he had given me. *That* I now proceed to communicate to my readers, with some probable variations of words, but none whatever of *circumstances*, as I learned them.

STORY OF

THE BEGGING BROTHER.

CHAPTER I.

It is full seven years since a lad, of about eighteen years of age, of delicate appearance, mild manners, and gentle, though not polished address, presented himself to the superior of the Trappist monastery, near Amiens, in Picardy, and demanded admission into the order. There was something altogether about this claimant for living burial that particularly struck the prior. He was dressed in the style of the better kind

of farmers, and his air and conversation bespoke him of that class; but a tone of natural refinement gave a delicacy to all he said or did. He spoke French well, but with a Belgic accent; and to the prior's inquiries as to the motives which led him, so young, to desire the seclusion, and brave the hardships of the most rigid of the religious orders, he answered, with a modest fervour, that "he felt a call from Heaven."

According to the system of the society, no questions were asked of the youthful aspirant after solitude, silence, and self-denial, as to his name or profession, who he was, or whence he came. He was regularly accepted, the ceremonies performed, his duties pointed out, his dress presented to him, his cell assigned him, and he installed in it, under the appellation of Brother Placidus. The calm facility with which the new brother entered into the functions of his station was quite remarkable. The closing of the gate that shut him from the world was echoed by no sigh of his; nor did any smile of satisfaction attend his entry into his newly-chosen state. Nothing seemed unfitting or

strange. The drapery of his costume hung easily on him; his shaven head appeared to cause him no inconvenience; the unbroken silence, the frugal fare, the midnight risings, nothing came amiss. It appeared as if he had at once dropped into the situation destined by Nature as his own peculiar place.

His attention to his duties was exemplary. He performed, with untiring alacrity, for some months, services to which he was evidently unaccustomed; and he did works of manual hardship to which the appearance of his hands proved him a stranger. After the usual time of severe noviciate, his vows were completed; and he was then released from his brown dress, distinctive of the labouring brothers. It was replaced by the white cassock—and Placidus was accordingly appointed one of the singers of the mass.

In this new station, to which he succeeded with a tranquil resignation, that spoke neither pride nor pleasure, he continued to display the same contented perseverance that had from the first distinguished him. His regularity in attendance to the seven hours' daily service in,

the chapel, which his duty claimed, was never once interrupted. He was almost always the first to enter; and the earliest sound of the bell was generally struck by his hand. During all this while his health was unimpaired. He retained his delicate appearance, but was never actually unwell. In strict pursuance of his vow, and of the rule of the order, no word escaped his lips; nor could the observing looks of the many who were seriously interested for him, obtain even one communicative glance from his unspeaking eye. His only converse was with his own thoughts—be they what they might.

For upwards of four years nothing occurred to break the monotonous course of the young Trappist's existence. No inquirers sought him; no wish or thought escaped him; and he was totally dead to the world. But at the expiration of the period mentioned, a new destiny awaited him; and, like a man risen from the grave, he was doomed to enter again upon the stage of life, and to explore scenes, and mix with society, in a way unknown to him, even

before he immured himself within the monastery walls.

The establishment of the new branch of the Trappist order on Catsberg, required the appointment of a prior and almoner, with other offices. The prior, chosen from among the brothers, a man of good manners and education, as well as strict and exemplary conduct, had no hesitation in approving the choice of Brother Placidus for his almoner, and "begging brother" to the institution.

It was not merely the quiet virtues and religious resignation of the young brother that made him the object of election to the elder ones. In abandoning the world the Trappists had not forgotten its ways; and they judged that the handsome features and interesting manners, the air of truth, and the mild enthusiasm of Placidus, was the most likely to soften the hearts of the benevolent public, and particularly that most sensitive sex, of whom donations were to be demanded, for an order of monks, unpopular from their overdone austerity, and from the vulgar notions which aggravate all that is repulsive

in their practices. Besides, Brother Placidus was beyond doubt a Belgian; and as his eleemosynary efforts would take a round in the direction of his own country, not to interfere with those of the main establishment, his native language would be, in fact, a necessary qualification for his office.

When the arrangements were finally settled between the principals of the establishment, the newly appointed almoner was silently summoned to hear the official announcement of his nomination. He calmly rose from his seat, and shaking off the train of secret meditation in which he was absorbed, he followed the mute messenger by whom he had been beckoned, ignorant and indifferent as to the object for which he was required. Arrived at the door of the parlour, where the prior was used to receive visitors, or transact business, the heart of Brother Placidus beat with a palpitation unknown to him since he entered the same room, a suppliant for admission into the order, above four years before. The thought glanced across his mind, that perhaps some intrusive inquirer had come to break the

stillness of his seclusion. He struggled to keep down his latent emotion; and, prepared to meet whoever might accost him, he entered the room.

He made a respectful obeisance as he entered; and raising his eyes, he observed no stranger face, nor yet one of those, of early association and endearment, on which the keen glance of affection can trace an expression ineffaceable by absence or age. The objects which presented themselves to his view were the prior, the brother named to the superintendance of the new branch society, and one other, the almoner and begging brother of the present main establishment. These faces were not strange to Placidus; and although he had never exchanged a word with two of the persons, and not with the other for near five years, still the familiarity of daily intercourse, eating at the same table, and being mutually naturalized to the same locality, created a sort of visual intimacy, which removed all restraint from the young Trappist, and left him quite at his ease to hear whatever communication was about to be made.

The prior rose, and advancing with a cordial and benevolent smile, he gave his hand to Placidus, and said,

"Brother, the restriction of years is removed. The time is come when you may indulge in the privilege which is permitted to all of us present. Taciturnity, so salutary to the well being of the brotherhood in general, must be dispensed with in the acting members of the order; and I have to announce to you that you are chosen as one."

The prior paused, and he and his associates awaited the evidences of grateful satisfaction, which they expected to witness in the looks and words of the young man. But no sound escaped him, and he only bowed obediently and respectfully, without the slightest change of countenance. The prior, pointing to a seat, which was taken by Placidus, and resuming his own, continued,

"A benevolent and pious individual has granted an endowment, of a house, land, and money, which enables us to extend our institution, by a new branch, to the very confines of Belgium; and it is on one of a little range of

mountains called Catsberg, that our new society is to be placed."

At these words Brother Placidus seemed to shrink involuntarily, and a deep glow suffused his cheeks. But it passed quickly over. He drew his hand across his brow, and let it descend, as if mechanically, on his heart; while a sigh, half suppressed, heaved his bosom.

"The worthy brother here beside me," continued the prior, "has been chosen chief of this new formed station; and there, on the verge of Belgium, if not actually in it, a native brother of exemplary character and conduct, will be required to act as almoner, and to make the usual rounds, demanding aid to our scanty funds from those charitable christians in whom the love of religion is superior to the vanities of the world. Such a brother, so qualified, we have found in *you*, for you are, I believe, a Belgian, and the rest I answer for."

When the prior concluded, a pause of some minutes ensued. The young Trappist evidently laboured under some strong hidden emotion, which he strove to overcome, and which the ob-

servers respected too much to allow of their interrupting him. The very use of speech, so long prohibited to him, was difficult to recover. He made more than one effort for utterance before he succeeded; and when he really spoke, it was in so confused and incoherent a way that he was startled and abashed. He, however, expressed, in sufficient phrase, his gratitude to his superiors for their confidence and marked approbation; he declared his readiness to obey any call made on his services for the good of the brotherhood; but concluded by saying, that "taken by surprise as he was, having hoped and believed that he should have lingered out life and sunk to death in the quiet oblivion of his retreat, he must beg a few days to prepare himself for his new avocation, and demand the favour of some instructions for his guidance in a calling for which he was sensible of his incompetence."

"Beloved brother," exclaimed the prior, "every indulgence, every consideration shall be given to your feelings and your wishes; and our good brother, Petrus Maria here, who has so

long served in the capacity of almoner to our establishment, will give you such suggestions as may render light to you, and advantageous to the brotherhood, a task for which I am convinced you are pre-eminently suited."

After salutations and congratulations from the new superior with whom he was to serve, and a blessing from the prior, Placidus followed his brother almoner to the little room assigned to the latter, for the regulation of the receipts, disbursements, and general accounts of the establishment, all which were under his care and controul.

Nothing could be more striking than the difference in all ways between the two almoners. The calm, pale, handsome countenance, and tall spare form of Placidus, were strongly contrasted with the coarse and swarthy visage, and short round figure of his Brother Petrus Maria. The latter had not been almoner and begging brother for seven or eight years for nothing. If he scrupulously performed his duties, he also conscientiously availed himself of the privileges allowed him by his station. Wearing, as per-

mitted, in his begging excursions, the ordinary habiliments of common life, (with the exception of the horse-hair shirt,) and his own black shock of hair growing out of all mode of La Trappe-ism, he also indulged freely in those points which hungry travellers consider necessaries of life. He ate heartily, and drank freely; and bore the natural marks of good living, in a speaking rotundity of person, and rubicundity of face.

Brother Petrus Maria had been chosen to his office from reasons the very opposite to those which led to the appointment of Placidus. It was his fluency of speech, his persevering address, (which might perhaps be translated *impudence*,) added to his knowledge of accounts, discovered by an accident, which formed the ostensible reason for his promotion. But he himself was frequently heard to declare that the real cause was his uncontrollable passion for talking, which made it almost impossible for him to observe the rule of taciturnity; that he was repeatedly near choking from being forced to swallow his half uttered words; and that if by chance he succeeded in keeping silent for a day, he was

sure to rouse the whole brotherhood of the dormitory by talking in his sleep at night. This was *his* version of the motives for his appointment; and as he was a Gascon, the chances were equal as to its being false or true. But the reasons which first induced him to enter such an unsocial order, never transpired. It was indeed whispered that he chose that sanctuary, in preference to a chance of the gallies; and that his present integrity as a monk, was quite necessary to balance the account against his former roguery as a man. As it was, he was considered by the brotherhood invulnerably honest in his actual calling; and no mendicant was ever hailed on his rounds with greater pleasure than was Brother Petrus Maria, or, as he was familiarly called, Brother Pierre, particularly when he put on the ludicrous grimace which he called his *begging face*, and discharged some of his most celebrated gasconades.

"Welcome, Brother Placidus, to my little cabinet," said he, as they entered the room; "it is pleasant to be able to say, how do you do? to a friend, for the first time after five years' ac-

quaintance. Sit down, and let us see in what way I can be of any use to you."

"The favour I would require from you, Brother," said Placidus, with as much composure as the agitation of his mind and the extreme difficulty of articulation allowed, "is that of your advice and information, as to the means of fulfilling the arduous labours of the office I am appointed to, so as best to acquit myself of so difficult and responsible a duty. But I do not at present wish to press this on you. I will allow you a day or two of undisturbed leisure, to form a little code of instructions for my guidance; and during the interval I hope to bring my mind to a state fitting to receive your kind and brotherly suggestions."

"A day or two, to form a code of instructions!" exclaimed the almoner, in surprise; "the arduous labours of your office! St. Peter preserve you, child, if these are the notions with which you enter upon it. Sit down, I tell you, and in ten minutes I'll give you as much really useful knowledge on our mutual calling, as if I

wearied myself and worried you with a volume of amplified trash—sit down—sit down."

Placidus obeyed the repeated invitations, took a chair, and prepared himself, in equal astonishment and satisfaction, to hear the simple secrets of a duty which to him had appeared so complicated.

"Now, my dear Placidus," said the almoner, "to set your mind at ease all at once, what, let me ask you, is the nature of your duty and mine? In one word, to go a-begging—to go a-begging, my boy, neither more nor less! What so easy, so pleasant, so natural to a man? It's an absolute instinct. Every one is born a beggar, and lives and dies the same. Many, to be sure, disguise their calling under the name of *borrowing;* but the only difference is, that your beggar *makes* no promise of payment, and your borrower *keeps* none. Others steal, rob, cheat—for there are nice distinctions—but all are only begging in masquerade: off-shoots from the native original root. I am a beggar by inclination as well as profession; and so are you, my brother, as you will find out on your very first essay. Well then, what so easy

as to obey a natural impulse? The principle once felt, the practice will soon follow. But I will give you a rule or two, and a reason for each.

"First, never go a-begging, or a-borrowing, with a sad face or a shabby coat. Your poor devil, in evident distress of mind or circumstances, has no chance of relief. It is your joyous, bold-faced, well-fed, solvent fellow, that has only to ask and have; and why, Brother Placidus? because the charity of half the world is *selfishness*, that does a service, small or great, only in the hope of getting a greater in return.

"Second, always half fill your leather sack, as I do mine, before you commence your collection. But take your purse out empty, and you will bring it back empty. And whenever you ask alms, be sure to rattle your money and open the mouth of your sack. There is a powerful magnet in gold that has been given to the poor; and the elements of the attraction are vanity and envy mixed; for the charity of the other half of the world, Brother Placidus, is *ostentation*, that prompts a man to do as much or more than

his neighbour, although he would let that neighbour starve if he chanced to fall into want."

Placidus, whose look of attention had gradually changed into a stare of horror, took advantage of the pause in the almoner's discourse, to express his feelings.

"Brother, brother," exclaimed he, "can this picture be real? You shock and terrify me! Is this indeed the world I am about to enter?"

"Ay, that it is," replied Petrus Maria, "a very true picture of worldly benevolence in general; but there are, no doubt, some exceptions. For instance, in a town of twenty thousand souls, you may receive aid from fifty who give money from mere recklessness, from a love of squandering, they care not how; a couple of hundred cowardly rogues may hope to buy off their ill-doings by a false benevolence; and perhaps half a dozen individuals may drop their mite into your sack, in the pure spirit of charity."

"And such are the exceptions?" murmured Placidus, covering his face with his hands.

"Excuse me, brother," said his companion, "for causing an ungratified longing to your

palate, while I satisfy mine—a man who talks must drink. Liquor is the food of speech; and thus I avail myself of my dispensation:" and he filled from a corpulent flagon, a glass of some rosy-coloured liquid, which he quaffed instantly.

Placidus scarcely observed him, and his palate was quite unconscious of his brother's indulgence. The latter, after repeated smackings of lips, and accompanying evolutions of tongue, that nothing might be lost of the unimbibed liquor, resumed his lecture.

"Of such materials, my dear brother, is composed the mass of beings among whom you are to recruit the funds of your young establishment. I know them well, in all their varieties; and I will give you a hint or two as to the way of managing them."

"Managing them!" echoed Placidus, with a strong emphasis.

"Ay, manœuvring them—working on their feelings, if they have any; on their *failings*, if not. There is nothing, Brother Placidus, that we must not do, for the good of our order and the love of God. Remember, then, whenever

you ask alms of a rich man, to appeal to his charity; if you beg from a man of moderate means, talk of his wealth; if women are the objects of your solicitations, you must praise the liberality of the old, the freshness of the middle-aged and fading, the piety of the young and vain. Thus you give credit to all classes, of both sexes, for what they have not, the reputation of which is just what they are best pleased to pay for; and, as one grand rule, *flatter all.* Be a perfect Turk in that respect—spare neither sex nor age; and you'll see, Brother Placidus, how fast the strong box of Catsberg will fill."

The harangue finished, Petrus Maria paused for breath, and poor Placidus sat gasping from agitation. He waited a while, in expectation of more of this revolting advice; but finding, by a significant nod from his companion, that there was no more to be said, he rose to depart. Oppressed with a thousand conflicting sensations, and unused to the forms of the world, he quitted the room in silence; and he heard his late counsellor murmur as he retired,

"St. Peter preserve the boy! If he does not mend his manners before he goes his rounds,

my poor brothers on Catsberg will have their beer-barrel filled with water, and be cut short of their inch of cheese for a whole month."

Placidus passed with hurried steps along the corridor, and had just reached a landing-place, from which a flight of narrow stairs led to his cell, when he encountered the prior, who had been paying a patro-fraternal visit to a sick brother above. This chance meeting seemed to Placidus a dispensation of Providence, to save him from the fate which appeared gaping to ingulph him. Following the hurried impulse of the moment, he flung himself at the prior's feet, and seizing him by the flowing folds of his dress, he sobbed forth, in scarce articulate utterance, his incoherent appeal. The first words distinctly understood by the prior were these:—

"For mercy sake, do not insist on this. It is too much for me—the frightful picture drawn by our brother yonder, of the hideous world, half drives me mad. I could not serve the brotherhood in such a station—I should sink under duties I was unable to perform—and all would end in injury to our order, and my own dis-

grace! Spare me, spare me from this dreadful result—relieve me from this misery—appoint some more fitting brother, I implore you—and let me but retire into the silence and solitude of my former state. Oh! take pity on me, and grant my humble and heart-inspired prayer!"

"Beloved brother," said the prior, in his kindest tone, feeling sincerely for the agitation of the youth, and at the same time remembering the weighty reasons for keeping him firm in his situation, "this emotion is but natural in a youthful and innocent mind. It gives the best surety of your fitness for the duties you will have to fulfil. Your appointment was the result of mature deliberation—the best interests of the new establishment are involved in it—it is, in short, irrevocable. But I am fully sensible of what you suffer, which, trust me, is only temporary. You will not find the world so bad as you expect. An upright man may safely hold with it such intercourse as yours, and walk unharmed through all its maze of vice. Brother Petrus Maria has perhaps coloured his picture too highly. He is rather satirical by nature, a

little cynical by habit, and *provincially* inclined to exaggeration withal. But I, too, have known the world—its bad and its good parts. I have known the meanness, the treachery, the selfishness of men, but I also have known their integrity and truth; and I have *felt*, dear Placidus, the healing breath of woman's virtue and ever-verdant faith, giving balm to the lacerated heart, and filling it anew with health and hope! Hasten to your silent cell—to your humble couch—commune with your innocent soul—all will be well. You have agitated me somewhat, and revived long-buried thoughts. This must not be!"

With these words the prior moved away, leaving Placidus struck with his evident emotion; but how much more a victim to his own! A new train of feeling was revived in his mind by the unpremeditated expression of that which had escaped his superior. The newly pictured world had faded from his view, and imagination hurried him back to days and scenes, that even the effacing wing of Time had failed to blot from his mind.

In this mood he reached his cell. He lay down on his lowly couch. The night he passed was pitiable, compared even to a Trappist's usual sad and scant repose. Unceasing sobs were heard by his solitary neighbours till the chapel bell and day-break summoned them away; and for the first time since his admission to the order, Brother Placidus failed to aid at the celebration of the midnight mass.

CHAPTER II.

In a few weeks afterwards the new branch of the brotherhood was firmly established on Catsberg. The portion of the building assigned to their use was fitted up in the manner suited to such tenants; and never were furnished lodgings less encumbered with furniture. The garden-ground was soon laid out, and the hungry earth fed with the seeds and plants which it was to reproduce in fruits and flowers. The working space was inclosed, and the sterile soil beyond it dug up and prepared, as much as its savage nature would allow, for the refinements of culture.

The ten or a dozen brothers who, with the prior and Placidus, had thus colonized the hill, were all soon named to their respective occupations; and the young almoner would gladly have exchanged his place for any of theirs, even at the risk of the healthy, but ungodly, glow that was forced into their cheeks by the labours which nature pointed out for man. While all these various works went on, Placidus was more tranquilly, but not less usefully employed. He had not repeated his visit to brother Petrus Maria. He preferred rather the conferences and counsel of the venerable prior and his own immediate superior; and by force of piety and resignation, he gradually saw in a less fearful aspect the monstrous expanse of difficulty and danger into which he was about to be launched.

But habit, still more powerful than advice, did wonders for him. The very day he quitted the monastery walls, and saw the champagne country opening out before him, he could not suppress the spring of delight that gushed spontaneous from his heart. He was evidently,

for a moment, transported with a feeling of happiness. It seemed as if nature had really spoken to him with her melodious yet thrilling voice, for he answered, as it were, by a loud uttered exclamation—" Yes, oh, yes, it is beautiful !"

Arrived at Catsberg, he entered into the active duties of his office with a species of vivacity which was surprising even to himself. It was the excitement of variety that irresistibly affected him, and threw an unhoped-for interest into his new pursuits. He arranged his accounts, and commenced his disbursements for the little society, and found a charm in occupation that quite astonished him. But the settled melancholy which in his former state of taciturn seclusion was not so evident, threw a deep shade over his manners in his new career. Long habits of profound silence made conversation irksome to him; and the little dealers in the village below the hill, from whom he made his purchases, and who looked with an evil eye upon the young establishment of monkery,

thought brother Placidus but a morose specimen of their new neighbours.

Placidus availed himself but sparingly of his privilege to go abroad. The garden walks were his usual promenade: yet he sometimes paced with hurried steps the heath-clad summit of the hill; and he was observed to make a regular daily visit (to which his demeanour gave the air of a pilgrimage), to one point of a rocky acclivity that hung over the valley which divided Catsberg from Scarpenberg. This valley was peculiarly romantic. It narrowed gradually into a glen, the shades of which formed a deep but not repulsive contrast with the open glade. The whole scene, lighted up by the joyous sun at spring-tide, the young leaves warmed into daily growth, and fluttering in the genial beams, like half-fledged birds afraid to make their first flight, was indeed lovely to look at. But it was evidently not the beauty of the scene that attracted Placidus, and fixed his ardent gaze upon the view beneath him. It was the mental vision that turned inwards on himself, and searched the mazes of memory with its piercing

glance, that could alone have absorbed him; and more than once a straggling brother, following his errant cows or goats through the brushwood on the hill side, observed the young almoner seated on some rocky projection, or stretched upon the heath, while sighs burst from him audible in the little copse beneath.

Some weeks having thus passed by, the brotherhood being established firmly, and their numbers increased by a few fanatics, or recruits less innocent, the neighbourhood, which had flocked in crowds to stare at the first comers, began to be familiarized to their grotesque appearance, and the general repugnance seemed gradually to wear away. The prior thought that this was the time to levy his first contribution; and he accordingly directed Placidus to prepare for his opening excursion, in his capacity of begging-brother.

It was on a fine morning in May, such as nurtures hope and confidence in the human heart, that Placidus doffed his usual costume; and, dressed in a neat suit of black, with his stick in his hand, he took his way down the

path leading to the village, having first received the blessing of the prior, and having himself implored that of a higher authority, at the foot of the altar in the little chapel. He felt an unwonted elation of spirits—he knew no humiliation in the mendicant purpose which sent him forth—he trusted that he was about to serve the interests of his order, and his countenance involuntarily reflected the cheerfulness of his mind. He so far, without design, fulfilled the first of brother Petrus Maria's instructions; but as to that which related to the garniture of his purse, he could not reconcile himself to the trick recommended by the less scrupulous and more practised almoner. It was therefore empty; and, like its bearer, ready to receive the gifts of the benevolent, unsullied by the jugglery of deceit.

As Placidus descended the hill, he could not help being struck with the recollection of Petrus Maria's axiom, "that begging was an instinct;" and of his prophecy that Placidus himself would feel and acknowledge it on his first essay. "Be it so!" exclaimed he, mentally. "Why then

should I differ from the rest of my kind? Thousands of the holiest of men have asked alms—Religion and the rules of my order sanctify the deed—I beg not for myself alone, and feel ennobled rather than degraded in the humble office. Now then to begin!"

He just then stood before the village inn, which, besides the common announcements of liquor and lodging, had the word "Brouwerie," which requires no translation, painted in large letters over the rudely daubed tulip which hung above the door. It was here that Placidus had heretofore resorted for the purchase of the beer scantily consumed by the brethren above. When the hostess and retailer of liquified malt and hops, saw Placidus in his black dress, she did not recognize him for the white-robed Trappist, to whose occasional visits of purchase she was accustomed; and when, on examination, she recalled his features, she could scarcely believe his cheerful countenance and affable demeanour to belong to her former melancholy and unsocial customer. She naturally imagined that the young man had emancipated

himself from his vows, and renounced the fellowship of his austere and ill-fed companions, and, stretching out her hand, she wished him joy of the change, in terms of much warmth.

"I always suspected it would end this way," said she, giving him no time for a reply to her first mistaken congratulation. "Extremes touch, they say, and I thought such excessive piety would have a wild fling at last—the barrel was too full to escape bursting! Come in, come into the house, Mr. Placidus, if that is the name we are still to give you—but happy I am, for your sake, not to call you *brother* any longer. A good breakfast is a stranger to your stomach. You shall have the best that the house affords; a slice of bacon, with the thigh of a potted goose, a bottle of beer, such as they never taste on the mountain, believe me, and the best of *caffé au lait*, bread and fresh butter. What do you think of that? It does my heart good to see your comely countenance brightened with a smile. Come in, come in."

The constitutional serenity of Placidus was not ruffled by this abrupt and ill-timed volley

of felicitations. "My good dame," said he, without obeying her invitation, "your kind wishes gratify me, but their expression is founded in mistake. I am still a Trappist, still *Brother* Placidus, still the almoner, and still what I have been all along, the caterer for the trifling wants of my brethren!"

"Indeed! you do astonish me," exclaimed the hostess, "but you are not the less welcome, good Brother Placidus;" and this might have been true, for having a fair portion of the national taste for gain, it was probably equal to her whether she made her profit on potted goose or barreled beer. Supposing, therefore, that her visitor came on his usual purpose of purchasing the latter commodity, she still pressed him to come in, assuring him that the last brewing surpassed in excellence all that he had before bought of, and proposing to send up a small cask to the monastery before the great demand of the neighbouring farmers had consumed all. "And pray," continued she, "excuse my error, in supposing you had parted company from the worthy gentlemen of the monastery; it arose

from seeing you in this christian suit of clothes, instead of the outlandish dress in which you and the other good brothers usually roam about the hill, like so many Turks without their turbans."

"Where no offence was meant, no apology is required, my good dame," said Placidus. "But you see me now in a character which you never knew me to assume before—the begging brother for our establishment!" And with these words he drew forth his leathern purse. The lank appearance of this recipient, which had hitherto opened before the landlady in much better plight, did not escape the quickness of her eye; and a sudden revolution of feeling was excited within her. She seemed seized with a shrinking antipathy to every thing that appertained to Trappism and beggary. The strings of her heart seemed instinctively tightening, as though her money had been deposited in its core.

"Yes, Madam," continued Placidus, glowing with the animation inspired by this first effort in the service of his brethren, "I am now but the humble mendicant, no longer the liberal

purchaser for my brother Trappists. You know, without doubt, that our order subsists on the alms of the charitable; and our little funds being now nearly expended, I this day commence a collection, to which I trust you will be the first to contribute."

"Me indeed! then you are much mistaken, Mister Mendicant. Me subscribe to the support of a parcel of lazy, good-for-nothing fellows, who do nothing but frighten the poor peasants with their grim looks, and haven't as much as a civil word to give to a body. No, no, not I indeed—not an *ortje**—so good morning, Sir, and a pleasant walk to you."

"Well, well," said Placidus, as he turned away, unruffled by her rude refusal, "this is a bad beginning: but, after all, the poorer we are the less beer we shall drink, and a trifle bestowed in charity might have been returned a hundred fold in honest profit."

He fairly struck the chord; all the national and personal feelings of the hostess answered in

* Half a farthing.

unison to his inuendo. She quickly returned towards him, and with a hard-wrought smile, she exclaimed, "Well, there is no resisting the workings of one's heart. I gave a hasty denial, my good Brother Placidus, and I am afraid not an over civil one. But I don't know what came over me—I don't, indeed. I am sure I never would have refused to contribute to the comforts of the good brotherhood of the hill, had I considered a moment. Open your little sack, and let this drop to the bottom of it. I heartily hope it may bring you luck. Would you like to take any thing?—just one glass of the new tap?"

Placidus excused himself, thanked the *re*considerate landlady for her bounty, and walked away, not less satisfied at the donation than at his own address in exciting the ruling passion to which it was due.

Encouraged by this success, his next attempt was undertaken with still more confidence and self-command. He approached the house of one of the wealthiest farmers of the district, who had fixed his residence in the village, which was

nearly surrounded by his various tenants. The large and well-built house, and its corresponding appurtenances, excited high hopes of a handsome donation, and Placidus entered at the half-open door with a feeling of gratitude for the anticipated gift.

Farmer Cloots happened to be at the moment in the common room, which, as usual in the country, served for kitchen and parlour to the family. A large table was spread for the breakfast of the whole establishment, consisting of master and mistress, their sons and daughters, and all the servants, in-door and out. Substantial loaves, butter, eggs, and cheese, gave evidence of liberal housekeeping; while the large coffee-pot, simmering by the fire-side, and the proportionate saucepan of milk upon the fire, told that good and generous living was common to all. Placidus augured still more favourably from these symptoms, and he readily advanced, on the invitation of the farmer, whose portly frame presented itself with a full front, his back to the fire, and his hands in his breeches pockets, in each of which he rattled sundry

pieces of money. At either side of him sat a female, one the partner of all his good fortune in life, who was occupied in preparations for making the *café au lait;* the other was a woe-begone figure in widow's weeds, who silently gazed on the flaming fagots, and seemed to read in them the history of her own misfortunes.

"Welcome, Sir, to house and table!" said the farmer, with ostentatious hospitality, as Placidus took off his hat and bowed to the trio: "to what, and to whom, may I ask, am I indebted for this visit?"

"I am, Sir, the alms-asking brother of the monks of La Trappe, established hard by, on Catsberg; and my object in this intrusion is to solicit your bounty towards the funds of an order whose sole means of subsistence are the donations of the pious and charitable."

"Ha!" interjected the farmer, screwing up his mouth, and buttoning his breeches pockets, "I have been expecting the honour of a visit like this: I wondered why you gentry forbore so long from levying a tax on

your industrious neighbours; but I suppose you were too busy digging your graves. You say, Sir, that you live on donations from the pious and charitable. Well, I am, I hope and trust, both one and the other"—(here his hands resumed their employment of rattling among his money)—"but neither piety nor charity tell me to pay a premium upon sloth; therefore, you get no donation from me!" again buttoning up his pockets. "Yes, Master Mendicant, I trust I am *pious:* I hear mass every morning, and I confess once a month. I believe I am *charitable,* as this poor woman can attest, who lives on my bounty, and has this very moment shared it!"—and once more the chink of gold and silver sounded on either thigh; "but I have nothing for the idle—nothing!"

"Nothing, or less than that, if possible," chimed in the for-better-for-worse companion of the last speaker; while a rather nice-looking girl, the eldest daughter of the well-matched couple, pulled her mother's apron, and elbowed her reproachfully, at the same time casting a look or two at the handsome almoner.

"I must receive your refusal with as much resignation," said Placidus, "as your bounty would have excited gratitude. I cannot force your purse to open, nor do I judge your actions, though you are so unsparing of ours: but I little expected" (and here he addressed the wife) "that Madame Vermoot, at the Tulip, yonder, would have given, while you refused; and I hope, Sir," turning to the farmer, "that a blessing will not be withheld from the doings of him who scorns and insults the poor."

Placidus bowed low, and was quitting the house, when he perceived the widow glide out of the door; and at the same moment the mistress of the mansion briskly demanded, "if, indeed, Madame Vermoot had given any thing?"

Placidus replied by producing the small piece of gold he had received from the hostess.

"No," said the *charitable* dame, "it shall never be said in the village that Vrowe Vermoot, the brewer, was before me in any thing. Here, take this piece, double the value of

hers, and put it in your sack, and let them jingle together, to tell which sounds the loudest."

"I have been thinking, Mister Trappist," exclaimed the farmer, even before his mate had finished her amiable harangue, "that one might as well not be so severe as I was just now. I am sure if any man merits a blessing, I do. I pray enough, and give enough to ensure it, at any rate; and I must not risk its loss, after all, by any want of moderate assistance to the deserving, as no doubt you and your brethren may be, in your own way. Pray accept this—do you think that enough to secure me from ill luck? You shall have more, if you really believe, in honesty and conscience, that that is not sufficient—but I hope it is—what do you say, Sir?" and a silver coin, of no great value, was held forth by this compound of ostentation and superstition. Placidus allowed the money to drop into his sack, answering only by a bow of thanks, and quitted the house, giving a grateful smile to the daughter, whose considerate interference to spare his feelings from hurt, had not

been lost on him. As he paused for a moment in the village street, to consider where he should next apply, a "Hem!" two or three times repeated, attracted his attention, and looking towards the sound, he saw the farmer's widowed pensioner standing half concealed in a recess, formed by the separation of two of the houses near him. She beckoned him to approach, and when he joined her she said in a timid tone,

"My good Sir, excuse the humble offering of a forlorn woman; and let this mite prove her wish to share her pittance with those scarcely poorer than she is. It is part of the weekly allowance which conscience wrings from that hard-hearted man—a feeble recompense for all the ill his avarice brought on me and mine. Take this, Sir, and my blessing with it, and excuse my boldness."

She then, with downcast eyes, offered a piece of money. Placidus was deeply affected by the humility of genuine charity, coming in such soothing contrast with the spurious examples he had just witnessed. He closed the widow's

hand upon her money, and pressed it between his.

"Excellent woman," said he, and his voice faltered as he spoke, "I *will* accept your blessing, but dare not take from your scanty store. In rejecting this sacred offering, I violate no duty to those whose wants have sent me forth. The poor must not prey upon the poor! Your gift has sanctified the little I possess, by the very intention of their mixing together, and Heaven's treasury will largely repay the proffered loan. Farewell, and may your blessing be returned a thousand fold! Farewell!"

It was thus, in such scenes as those (sketched from his own brief recital of them to the prior) that Placidus continued his rounds of alms-asking. In a short time he had seen human nature in many of its capricious forms, and he did not neglect to profit by his experience. He had, as has been seen, on his earliest attempt, availed himself of his intuitive knowledge of the heart, and of his acquaintance with the two leading faults of his nation—avarice and super-

stition. Resolved to extract what was good from every thing that tended towards the well-being of those for whom he was the agent, he was not unmindful of Petrus Maria's advice, "to work on the failings of mankind." This he thought all fair, for a just and pious object; but he never degraded himself or his calling by any unworthy tampering with the feelings or passions of those he begged from; and he scorned to blend servility with the natural humbleness of his spirit.

He mixed a good deal with rich and poor, as he took the circuit of the neighbouring towns, and he came unharmed and unsullied through the ordeal he had dreaded so much. He had considerable success in his collections, and brought handsome returns to the monastery's store. He throve in his vocation; he looked, in a few months, healthy and strong, in comparison to his former delicate appearance; and he felt an elasticity, a vigour, and an expansion of mind, which he at once enjoyed and was amazed at. But the wonder is easily solved. It was *employment* that performed this magical

change—that simple cure for all the indolent and dissipated portion of mankind, who waste in sloth the precious goods of time, and let them slip away like the sands that trickle in his glass.

Bailleul, Poperingue, Cassel, and all their surrounding neighbourhood, were in their turns visited by the begging brother; but it was remarked, that he studiously avoided the glen which divided Catsberg from Scarpenberg.

CHAPTER III.

The summer months were passing rapidly away. The last Sunday in July had arrived, and the begging brother, after his most distant and most successful expedition in search of alms, was returning to Catsberg, on his route from Ostend, when he entered the town of Furnes, between three and four o'clock in the afternoon. He had quitted the barge that carried him to the end of the open suburb called the Nieuport-*gate;* and, as he walked forwards, that appellation gave rise to many a reflection on the mutability of human creations. Not a fragment was discoverable of what was formerly the strong

built bulwark of this ancient place. The name of *rampart*, still attached to the green hedged walk and bordering gardens which wind round three parts of the town, is another instance of the courtesy of recollection speaking to the pride of ruined grandeur.

As Placidus walked on, the loud and rapid tolling of a church bell gave notice of some evening ceremony, more than the mere chaunting of vespers. His pious feelings were gratified at the opportunity so promised him of joining in some holy rite; and a sentiment of religion blended with the historic and philosophical reflections that filled his mind. He moved quickly towards the centre of the town. The street he walked through, which seemed quite destitute of inhabitants, was strewed with herbs and flowers; and the mean and diminutive houses at each side were hung with every rag of drapery that their poverty could supply. Groups of peasants were entering the town, and all wending towards the church, a deep expression of superstitious curiosity stamped on the majority of the faces, from

which the atmosphere of their native marshes had forced every wholesome tint.

The cheerless and poverty-stricken aspect of all he saw, gave the contemplative Trappist ample occasion to moralise on the existing contrast with the state of this very town, some centuries back, when it had eight seigneuries and nearly fifty villages in its jurisdiction, when the counts of Flanders made it their occasional residence, and the central point of their splendour, braving, for its attractions and advantages (hard at this day to trace or imagine), the danger of its climate, at all times proverbial.

Placidus reached the principal square. The crowd which filled it, as well as his own curiosity to examine it, made him pause at the opening from the street which he was quitting. Before his mind wholly gave up its reverie on times past, it lingered a moment on the associations connected with the objects around. His eye rested on the large brick mansion on his right hand. In its crumbling edges and the curious masonry of its angular roofs, he read age and respectability, while the iron-grated windows

spoke its modern purpose, of coercion and misery. The florid architecture of the mansion occupying the opposite corner of the square, its elevation over the neighbouring dwellings, and the national and civic arms ornamenting its porches and windows, revealed its quality, as the ancient residence of sovereigns and governors, and its present use, as the seat of judicial and corporate importance. But his attention was soon drawn from these dull memorials of past or present scenes to a display of human weakness, in the guise of a religious ceremony, almost unparalleled for absurdity, and which, had impiety, instead of superstition, been its motive, would rank among the most flagrant outrages upon that which it is meant to honour.

The whole of the large square, which serves for market-place, was filled with a throng of inhabitants and country people, mingled together in a common mass of gaping and awe-struck anxiety. On Placidus inquiring as to the cause of the assemblage, he was told by a man beside him, in a whisper of deep reverence, that the procession of "The Passion" was just

on the point of departure from the church, the approach to which he pointed out in the opposite corner of the square, beside the Hotel de Ville. Placidus having ascertained from his informant the route in which the procession was to move, contrived, in the activity of his zeal to witness it closely, to work his way through the crowd, and finally to fix himself in a niche of one of the old houses, from which he could command an uninterrupted view.

The sudden silence of the bell which had so long pealed its notice of the approaching ceremony, was now the announcement that it had commenced. An immediate and perfect stillness pervaded the multitude that had hitherto mingled its murmurings with the tolling sound. Every head was instantly uncovered: every knee was on the earth: not a voice was to be heard; and as Placidus overlooked the silent mass, and marked the thousands close jammed together, their bended bodies moving involuntarily to and fro, in wave-like agitation, he was impressed by the solemn spectacle of human power bowed down by what fanaticism elevates

into religious awe, but what philosophy pronounces servile fear.

The softened harmonies of a band of music, the chaunting of the priests, the voices of the choristers, broke faintly on the ear; and, as the procession advanced, increased into a full swell of harmony. The banners, common to this and a hundred other mummeries, were now seen moving along; and the whole display of priestly fraud and popular folly was evident in minute detail, sanctioned by the presence of all the judicial and executive authorities of the town, whose cloak of political hypocrisy was impervious to the gaze of their rustic dupes.

I shall not attempt a minute description of the procession of the Passion* annually exhibited in the town of Furnes. It is enough to state that all the circumstances of that deeply affecting event are parodied, with a revolting defiance to the solemnity of its record. The character of Christ and his apostles, and the other personages connected with the subject, are represented

* For an account of the origin of this ceremony, see note at the end.

in this spectacle, by simple villagers, from motives of true piety, and sometimes by less innocent actors, in a spirit not so pure. On all, however, the masquerade sits ludicrously ill. The mountebank costume and mock demeanour being alike disgusting and absurd.

To the observing group of town's-people whom the spirit of enlightenment has awakened from the dark trance which still enshrouds the majority of their countrymen, the view of this exhibition, taken in connexion with their knowledge of the mummers that enact it, must be infinitely amusing or intensely painful, in proportion to the feebleness or force of their religious feelings. But Placidus saw no subject for either levity or regret in the paltry pageant which passed by him. His enthusiasm, his long and deep-formed habits, the absorption which his mental faculties had undergone, on matters of religious *feeling* in concert with sectarian *form*, all conspired to blind him to the reality of what he witnessed; and not one of the ignorant fanatics that figured in the scene was more darkly unconscious of the degradation

thus inflicted upon man, and the insult it implied to his Maker.

The only part of this procession that has the least claim to the sympathy of common sense is that which closes it, and which is formed by *real* sentiment and suffering combined. It consists of the wives, sisters, children, or attached friends of the victims to disease, who at all times abound at Furnes, but more particularly in the fever-breeding weeks that close the summer season. Although the most certain epoch for this local plague had not, at the time I describe, actually arrived, there was still enough of illness in the town and neighbourhood to secure a long train of suppliant females, many of whose pale and sunken features gave evidence that neither health nor hope were strong within them. But there was one observable among the train, the beauty of whose countenance marked her for admiration, while an expression of animated piety distinguished her whole air from the sombre superstition of those that preceded and followed her. Her plain and modest dress shewed her to own no higher rank than that of

the agricultural class of small landholders, who, with their tenant peasantry, chiefly composed the procession. A white veil hung loosely from her head, which was covered with a close cambric cap, bordered with deep lace. An unembroidered muslin robe formed the remainder of her costume, as she walked on, a long wax taper in her hand, ready, when the procession should be over, to burn before the shrine of her peculiar saint.

As this interesting figure approached the spot where Placidus stood, his eye was fixed upon her with an ardent and searching expression, that lasted but one moment. In the next, he exclaimed aloud, "Gracious Heaven! It is she—Melanie!"

At the sound of this voice, and the call upon her by name, the young female stopped suddenly, looked incredulously towards the place where Placidus had stood, and interrupted for an instant the regular march of the procession. But her eyes found not what they sought. Placidus had left his station, and was seen, to the utter amaze of the persons round him,

rushing into the very centre of the crowd, whose undulating movement marked where he had forced his way. The young woman, baffled in her apparent hope of seeing the person she sought, attempted for a while to recover herself, and then strove to continue her forward movement. But she was soon forced, by her emotion, to pause once more. Her face became pale, tears started to her eyes, and she was nearly letting fall her consecrated taper to the earth, where it was evident she would soon herself have sunk, had not a fine-looking young man stepped quickly into the line of the procession, caught her in his arms, and led her into one of the houses.

The intrusive and fugitive Trappist was soon obliged to stop, finding it impossible to penetrate far into the resistance opposed by the passive density of the crowd. He could not, if he would, retrace his passage; and he was consequently forced to remain in this imprisonment, during the entire continuance of the solemn mockery which paraded the square and streets.

At length the crowd began by degrees to dis-

solve. The loosened mass of human beings separated little by little, and Placidus had free room for egress. But when the opportunity was afforded he seemed unconscious of it, and he stood in a state of stupified abstraction, until the square was almost totally abandoned by the assemblage; and when at length he started from this unconsciousness, he found himself quite alone, close by the fountain in the middle of the square. He cast his looks around, and soon perceived that he had attracted the observation of a few stragglers, who eyed him curiously from a distance.

Recovering at once enough of self-possession to know the awkwardness of his situation, and regain power to fly from it, he hurried away. He hastened towards the nearest outlet from the town; and on inquiring of a lounging inhabitant of the suburb, he found that he had taken, by chance, the very road he sought—that leading to Ypres and Poperingues. In this direction he walked for full two hours, mechanically proceeding towards Catsberg, but every mental movement retrograding far from all the actual

circumstances of his present home and state. Still he fled towards that cheerless home, as if it were a sanctuary from pursuing thought, like some hunted animal, vainly seeking shelter in its solitary lair.

He had reached the opening of the by-road, which branches from the main *chaussée*, leading direct to Ypres, and he turned into that secluded and rather gloomy track, which the finger-post pointed out as the readiest way to Steinwort, a bourg in the close neighbourhood of the monastery. Nothing could be more oppressive to a mind, harassed by painful excitement, than the effect of the surrounding scenery, with the loaded and almost suffocating state of the atmosphere. The country was thickly wooded. The outstretching branches of the trees were unmoved by any breath of air: their heavy shadows lay upon the road, without any of those fantastic shiftings by which they often trace a moral on the path of a lonely wanderer, and like the caprices of fortune on "the broad highway of the world," leave him for a moment in sunshine only to replunge him into shade.

Distant thunder had, during the whole afternoon, been faintly echoing in the sky, and its vague murmurings seemed in unison with the oppressive combination through which the Trappist slowly plodded along.

An interruption consistent with the scene at length aroused him, and caused him to look up. It was a thick cloud of dust that suddenly and silently enveloped him, the state of the road having prevented his hearing the trot of the huge chesnut Flanders' mare, whose heavy hoofs ploughed up the sand beside him. Through the dimness of the dust Placidus observed the figure which bestrode the animal. It was that of a man, of a size proportionate to his beast, a complete model of a wealthy Belgian farmer. His head was covered with a fox-skin cap, the long leather shade in front of which stood out far before the outline of his face, and more than half concealed it from view. A blue cotton smock-frock, thickly worked with red worsted round the neck and on the breast, preserved his holiday clothing from damage. The bottom edge of this garment, which the trot of his mare

had worked up above his knees, was met by the tops of an unwieldy pair of boots, such as are worn by the heaviest of our heavy dragoons. Attached to this important portion of the habiliments of a Belgian cavalier, were a pair of silver spurs, of great thickness and length; a whip, the handle heavily mounted with the same metal, in the form of a hammer, hung by a leather thong on the horseman's right arm; the reins of a cumbrous bridle lay loosely on his left wrist, and he sat entrenched in the unshapely depth of a saddle, which rose high before and behind him, and nearly covered with its broad square flaps the whole carcase of the animal that was doomed to bear its weight: it, as well as the bridle and crupper, was thickly studded with brass buckles and plates in various devices. Underneath was a crimson cloth, bound with yellow worsted tape; the undermost of all the housings being a green net, which did not leave a bit of the overloaded mare, from head to tail, free from encumbrance of one kind or another. Even the poor tail itself, which would have delighted in switching off the flies that left in many places

bleeding traces of their assaults, was clubbed up, and tied in an ungainly lump with a wisp of straw, quite out of keeping with the caparison I have described. The horseman sat, body and limbs alike, in a dangling sort of lounge, a rather costly pipe in his mouth, from which he puffed a cloud of smoke nearly as thick as that of dust ascending all around him.

A half-muttered salutation escaped with one of these exhalations, as the rider came close upon Placidus. The latter, taken quite by surprise, did not make any acknowledgment. The other repeated his words of vapoury courtesy, in a tone not very loud, but sufficiently astounding to the Trappist to make him start with astonishment.

"Good God!" said he, almost to the hearing of the horseman, "what am I to think of this? Am I indeed discovered and beset?"

But the horseman did not actually hear the exclamation, and in a fit of furious irritation at receiving no reply to his twice-uttered civilities, he pulled up his reins, with a quickness and force acting so suddenly on the severe and heavy

bit, as to make the mare rear up erect, while she threw her fore legs forward, so close to Placidus, that he suddenly sprang across the ditch. A fierce application of the rider's spurs brought the mare again to her proper equilibrium; but she plunged violently, and while an angry contest took place between her and her master, he exclaimed, in a voice of thunder, to the alarmed Trappist,

"Good evening, Sir! Good evening to you, I say! That is the third or fourth time I have said it, and I don't know what you mean by your insulting silence, nor will I bear it—so good evening, I say, once more!"

His passionate emotion barely allowed him to hear the trappist's timid reply.

"I am glad you have found your tongue, Sir," cried he, in a somewhat softened tone, "for I hate quarrelling—but I can't stand an insult. But why do you quit the road? Perhaps you are more afraid of me than of my mare? But you need not be so, for I am not a robber, young man. You may safely come through the hedge again. Joos Cooperslangen,

of Scarpenberg, is not a name to be scared at; it is pretty well known in these parts. Come, come, take to the road again, you will have bad walking in that copse: I have told you who I am."

"I know it but too well!" said the Trappist mournfully to himself; and a deep sigh was the only audible answer to the choleric horseman's speech. The instant Placidus had heard the sound of his voice, he recognized him for an old acquaintance of his earliest years: one connected with all that had attached him to the world, and driven him from it in his boyish days, the father of that lovely female, whose sudden apparition in the procession had forced the astonished Trappist to fly, unconscious of all but her presence and his own danger.

In much less time than is required for the telling, he revolved in his mind a hundred recollections connected with the man now so close to him, whose very mention had, from childhood to puberty, been a formidable bane to every pleasurable sensation. Scarcely had he quitted his cradle, and began to walk alone, when the

name of Joos Cooperslaugen, "the mountain giant," was the by-word of terror that was rung in his infant ears. This appeal to his fears was never made in vain. The whispered syllables, with a finger held up to caution or threaten the child, were sure to silence his complaining, whether of ill temper or ill health, and he hid his face in the readiest refuge. Joos Cooperslaugen was his father's friend; and though the distance between their residences scarcely allowed them to be neighbours, he often called and sometimes dined at his house, when bursts of his violent temper were not unusual. The voice of this unwelcome visitor, was sure to cause a shudder in the boy; and his appearance across the threshold was invariably followed by the retreat of the latter to some dark shelter, or by his rapid exit from the house. By degrees he became more accustomed to, and less scared at, the "big man of Scarpenberg," another of Joos's familiar appellations; but, even when shame at his own timidity, or a stronger motive still—the strongest of all motives—acted freely and forcibly on his mind, he could never con-

quer the early dread which the folly of his mother or his nurse, or both, had planted in his infant heart. Many an instance of the effects of this, and some of them bitterly painful, now rose reflected to the Trappist in memory's officious glass; and his gentle nature was almost agitated into a mental execration of the object which, after a lapse of several years, he once more gazed at and shrunk from. Instead of complying with the rather uncourteous invitation to abandon the shelter of the copse, the Trappist pursued its obstructed path, and after a silence of some time, he replied, in a low voice, that he preferred it to the dust-covered road.

"Very well, Sir, as you like, every man to his fancy, as the burgomaister of Rousbrugge said, when he married his meysthen*—any thing for me but incivility; work your way through the brambles, I will stick to the dust; and we may have some social chat across the hedge, to shorten the road."

The Trappist had many a contending emotion

* A servant girl.

to struggle with. Question upon question pressed towards his lips, but he dared not venture to utter them. He would have asked after his parents, his brother—for the natural feelings of the man were, at the moment, more powerful than those of the recluse, the devotee, the fanatic. He would have mentioned another name, more near to his companion's heart than the name of his old friend; but the risk of betraying himself closed his lips against the utterance of a word, beyond a few common-place remarks on the weather, and these in a tone so timid and obscure, as to create a strong suspicion in the mind of the hasty horseman, that the traveller who so cautiously avoided his observation, must be of a very questionable character. This impression put all his notions of courtesy to a rapid flight, for he was an honest man, who officially hated a rogue; and his plain, rough disposition scorned any appearance of what it was not.

"Hark ye, Sir," said he, in a determined tone, after giving himself a moment's pause, for preparation rather than reflection, and rising

high in his stirrups, perhaps to let his huge size be more apparent—"Hark ye, Sir, I thought you suspected me just now of being no better than I should be, so I told you frankly who I was. I now suspect *you* to be worse than you ought to be, and I tell you so without ceremony. No honest traveller skulks in the shade of the evening behind hedges and ditches. The open track is his, as it was your's a while ago, when you had it all to yourself. It is only for guilt to shrink out of the public way. That is my rule of the road; and the judgment of Joos Cooperslaugen on such a point has never been doubted, I believe. I am overseer and supervisor of this district, and it is my duty to see it kept clear of all suspicious persons. You will therefore tell me, without hesitation, who and what you are."

The Trappist knew the determined character he had to deal with, and was aware of his authority as a public functionary. He was also certain that nothing was more likely to send him off than the knowledge of the profession of him whom he questioned, for he had a deep and

most irreverent antipathy to monks and mendicants; and as he could not punish them for walking in the public roads, his next resource was to abuse them first, and then fly from them. The answer to his abrupt inquiries was, therefore, as follows.

"Without questioning your official right to ask me who I am—a right which it is my duty to accord to the lowliest peasant—I tell you, Sir, that I am a brother of the order of La Trappe, returning from a mission of alms-seeking for the benefit of our monastery on Catsberg."

"The devil you are! then you are the very man I want." A painful misgiving seemed to sink the Trappist's heart—"the very man, though any other of your tribe would have done as well. I wonder you never paid me a visit at Scarpenberg; but that is nothing to the purpose now. Hard by us here, at Huysenclau's farm, in a house which I have just now left, lies a sick man, who calls out for the aid of a priest, as the doctor has failed him. A friend has tried the procession of the Passion to-day at Furnes, but

the fever is too strong for that—and now, poor fellow, finding himself at the last, and without a chance of life, he wishes to prepare for death. My heart was heavy as I rode along, and sorrow never mends a man's temper: so don't you follow a bad example, and be angry with me, because I was somewhat rude to you; but step across yonder ploughed field to that open gate: you will see a house close by—a hut, rather—go into it fearlessly, if you are not afraid of the fever—but your sanctity protects you from infection, no doubt — tell what you are, and who sent you—you will be well received—and it will be well for him who wants you, if your prayers meet as warm a welcome in Heaven. God grant they may!"

These concluding words were uttered to himself, as if in his own despite. The Trappist gazed at him, as he put spurs to his mare and gallopped off; and could not help being struck, and somewhat affected, by the softened manner of the rough and boisterous man. He heard the involuntary prayer which had escaped him, and it subdued any rising resentment at the sneers

which had interlarded his speech. Every personal consideration was in a moment buried deep in his heart. It was filled with fervid anxiety for the object he was so summoned to attend; and he proceeded, at a quick pace, towards the spot indicated by Joos Cooperslaugen.

CHAPTER IV.

From the gate, which he soon reached, the Trappist immediately discerned the dwelling, the only one to be seen in the circuit of dreary landscape visible through the mist. The loaded clouds obscured the rays which the sun still threw above the horizon, beneath which he was sinking, and vapours floated on all sides over the pools and marshes. The cottage, or, as Joos Cooperslaugen had rather disparagingly corrected the appellation, the hut, was situated in a large pasture-ground of many acres extent. The little eminence on which it stood was planted thick with poplars, and a few aquatic trees

of the willow tribe drooped down unhealthily into the stagnant ditch that surrounded the whole. A shroud of vapour rose steaming up, as if ready to enfold the hapless tenant of the place; the herds of cattle scattered in the pasture were lowing mournfully, and discordant croakings resounded from every sedge. The Trappist paused for an instant on the weed-covered path that led to the cottage, which appeared, wretched as it was, and sad as was his mission to it, a refuge from the dreariness and melancholy without.

He crossed the narrow plank thrown over the ditch, and approached the half-closed door. He stepped cautiously, but he was heard by those within; and just as he prepared to tap gently for entrance, the white dress of a female appeared at the door, which slowly opened, and displayed to the Trappist the face and form of her whom he least thought of meeting — it was Melanie that stood before him. She was pale and agitated; and evidently did not recognize the visitor, on whom she cast a look at once inquiring and fearful.

A pang of surprise seemed to transfix the Trappist to the spot. He could not fly, as he had done a few hours before. He was now stunned by the recurrence of the vision which had then affected him so acutely. He was incapable of motion or speech, and for a moment or two, sensation itself seemed paralyzed. He gazed at her with an expression which was rendered more intense by the terrifying doubt that the scene before him was the creation of his over-excited brain. The faint twilight, and the shades of the cottage, which fell upon and almost concealed him, secured his emotion from self-betrayal; and the brief space of this inaction sufficed to rally his thoughts, to convince him that what he saw was no mockery, and to give birth to many an abortive surmise, as to the events which brought him so close to the being whom, of all others, he was most desirous to shun. She, the agitated Melanie, fatigued, and trembling from mixed emotions, little knew at the time the person whose embarrassed silence so added to her other alarms. She at length

falteringly addressed him, and inquired his business.

It were difficult to describe the effect produced on the Trappist by the sound of the voice which syllabled the words of that inquiry. Who has not felt the thrill caused by the faintest tone of a being once, and for ever, dear to the heart? And who needs be told of the throbbings it sends through that heart, like the vibrations of a lake on which the lightest leaf has fallen? The Trappist trembled as he listened to Melanie's twice-uttered question. Her voice seemed to speak the thoughts of years gone by; and it called up the instantaneous and confused remembrance of sensations that could never again exist. But he was still alive to the propriety, the necessity of resisting the influence of the past. He only wished for strength to escape the fascination which threatened to enthral him. With this hope he conceived the instant project of breaking away from the spot, feeling, through his agitation, that even the abandonment of a fellow-christian to an unshrined death was venial, in comparison with

risking the breach of his sworn renouncement of all that might lead to enjoyment or temptation.

He therefore prepared to withdraw, and had he done so, abruptly and silently, he had escaped discovery and all its consequences. Safely screened by the shadows of the cottage, he ventured in his abstraction to address to Melanie a sentence of apology for his intrusion, not supposing that she would have recognized his voice, though he felt that *her* very whisper would have been to him a piercing sound through all the united discords of the world. But his want of self-confidence, and freedom from self-opinion, had in this instance deceived him. No sooner did he speak his first confused words of courtesy, than Melanie, with simultaneous movement and utterance, sprang forward, clasped him in her arms, and exclaimed, through a half-suppressed scream of joy,

"It is, it is you, Ernest! It *was* then your voice that struck my ear and pierced my heart this evening, like a sound from the grave—and you are now with me once again! And you are indeed alive and well, and returned to us all—

to those who have so long mourned you as lost to them for ever! Come in, come in—but oh, God, where do I ask you to come! No, no, Ernest, you must not enter here. Can it, can it be you that I hold in my arms? Oh, speak to me again, dear Ernest, and tell me that all this is not a dream!"

Ernest Vandersteen, for so we must now call our young Trappist, listened to this burst of Melanie's tenderness—saw the tears that bedewed her cheek—felt the gentle pressure of her arms—and trembled like a child in the grasp of a giant. He scarcely knew what he said, or would have said, but he spoke.

"And is this *you*, Melanie, again—a second time raised up before me? By what magic are you here, in this wretched place? Why did your father send me here to find *you?* He spoke of a dying man, who—"

"Oh, do not say dying, Ernest—his life is still in the hands of Heaven."

"Who is the sick man, Melanie? Is it Nicholas? It must be he. Is Nicholas dying?"

"No, Heaven be praised, he is well; but,

Ernest, what ails you and agitates you in this frightful way? Why do you smile so wildly, and tremble so fearfully? This is *not* Ernest —you are not he—leave me—let me enter the house." But she could not escape the convulsive embrace that strained her to his breast. Her reply to his inquiries—her doubts of his identity—her anxious questioning, were all unheard, and he incoherently spoke again, still holding her firmly clasped.

"Is he *dying*—your father said he was? *Is* Nicholas dying?"

"He is well, he is well. In mercy loose this desperate hold. If indeed you *are* Ernest, take pity on me—you terrify me—Nicholas is not ill—your brother, my husband, is not ill."

"Brother—husband—true, true! What am I about? What madness is this? And you! Melanie! Gracious Heavens, what fiendish notion flashed across me? Not Nicholas? Thank Heaven, thank Heaven! Now then to the death-bed duty—I am quite ready."

With the rapid enunciation of these broken sentences, he had released Melanie from his

wild embrace; and he abruptly pushed open the door of the cottage, which she had cautiously closed, unheeding the faint effort which she made to prevent his entrance. Alarmed at his whole air and conduct, which she attributed to insanity, she followed him in.

He passed rapidly through the empty room which first received him, and thence into an inside closet which contained a bed. In this he perceived the sick man lying; while a woman sat beside, and appeared in an attitude of deep watchfulness. The solemn sadness of the scene acted promptly and powerfully on the half-distracted Trappist, and he advanced with gentle steps to the bed-side. The woman rose at his approach—the sick man raised his head—Ernest threw his looks from one to the other alternately; and leaning for support upon a table beside him, he groaned deeply, and exclaimed in a hollow murmur,

"God of heaven, can this be? My father, my mother, what can this mean? Can it, can it be so?"

The altered voice and dimly revealed features

were in a moment acknowledged by the mother as those of her long mourned and favourite child. She rose from her chair, and in an excess of parental joy, loudly pronounced his name, and covered him with caresses, forgetful of the danger which the shock of his abrupt appearance might bring to his suffering and nearly exhausted father. But the latter felt no sudden emotion. The nerves were too much shattered, and nature too nearly worn out, to be capable of receiving a shock. The announcement of his son's return and presence was plainly understood by the once sturdy farmer, who, in former days, would have bounded with boisterous joy at the happy news; but who now calmly looked his consciousness of it with listless indifference. Indeed, all worldly feelings seemed extinct in him. He threw his eyes upwards, and looked as if towards heaven; and he murmured, in anxious and even fretful fervour,

"Oh, send me a priest! must I perish in want of holy consolation!"

These words, uttered in a tone of such despondency, made Ernest shudder. He could

no longer doubt the evidence of his senses, bewildering as was the conviction which they brought to him. It was indeed his mother, whose woe-stricken countenance was before him—his father, who was the occupant of the bed that seemed too wretched for even death to make his own. Those parents, so dear to him, whom he had abandoned with such anguish, in the full possession of wealth and health, now reduced to the depths of poverty, and one of them to the verge of the grave! Yet he saw it was so—and the time did not serve for inquiry as to the cause. His father's call for a priest was the most stirring excitement to his feelings; and gently disengaging himself from his mother's embrace, he sunk on his knees by the bedside, and in a voice, at first half choked with emotion, but gradually recovering its wonted fulness and power, he cried—"My dear father, your call is not in vain—Heaven has hearkened to your prayers—and I, your child, justly punished and agonised by witnessing your sufferings, am mercifully allowed to be your solace in this awful hour. I, dearest father, am a priest, the lowliest

servant of Heaven, the least worthy member of our holy church; and I invite you, in the name of that church, by the sanction of that Heaven, to repose your weary spirit, and pour forth the fulness of your heart in confession and prayer."

Astonishment was depicted on the faces of the listeners to these words, but a feeling of deep respect, excited by the sanctity of the speaker's tone and manner, kept down the expression of surprise, which struggled for utterance with both his mother and Melanie. The first threw up her wondering eyes towards heaven, while Melanie stood, with clasped hands, and looks that seemed to speak a still more heartfelt joy than could be excited by the mere accomplishment of the old man's wish. He, the object most interested in Ernest's avowal of his holy calling, wore a mingled look of eagerness and doubt upon his haggard features. Ernest observed this expression, and to remove at once the scepticism which gave it birth, he bowed down his head, so as to expose the shaven mark upon his crown, though to avoid a too evident

singularity he had suffered his hair to grow again, on the other parts of his head.

"See, father, see here the humble mark of my profession—place your hand on the tonsure which denotes my sacred office"—and the sick man's shrunken arm was extended, and his fingers felt on the Trappist's low-bowed head, as Isaac sought for evidence of his son's identity—but the modern parent was not, like the Hebrew sire, deceived.

"May Heaven bless my child!" feebly, but with an air of pious conviction, uttered the old man. And Ernest, catching the words, and feeling the weak, yet thrilling pressure of the hand that still rested on his head, could not resist the unpriestly thought, that he never was truly consecrated until then. Both the female witnesses were deeply awed and affected at the scene. Melanie sobbed audibly; while the prayers and thanksgivings of the mother spoke at once her gratitude to Heaven, and her mingled pride and reverence for her son. An expressive look from the old man, and a mild

suggestion from Ernest, caused the weeping women to retire; and the door was closed upon this solemn, and, perhaps, unparalleled instance, of a repentant father laying bare the deepest secrets of his heart, before the absolving authority of his son.

The sanctity of faith, in both communicant and clergyman, covers such scenes with a veil, which even those who condemn the rite would hesitate to raise. The confession of Martin Vandersteen was, therefore, inviolate in the bosom of his child; but the character of the penitent was too common-place and unmarked to have engendered any but such every day failings, as the priest might conscientiously have pardoned.

CHAPTER V.

Melanie and her mother-in-law had scarcely retired into the outer room, their reverential feelings towards the scene that passed within keeping them silent, when Nicholas Vandersteen, the son and husband, Ernest's elder and only brother, hurriedly entered the cottage. He was flushed and fatigued, and had evidently put forth his utmost speed; but he entered on tip-toe, and his whispered inquiries for his father were answered as cautiously by his wife. She acknowledged, in his solicitude for his parent, and in the hoarse muttering of the approaching thunder, sufficient reasons for the haste which

had urged him towards home, and without questioning him as to the cause, she quickly recounted the extraordinary appearance of Ernest, and explained his sacred occupation at the time.

At any other moment Nicholas would have shewn more surprise and more pleasure at this unlooked-for intelligence; but an absorbing anxiety pressed on him, and left him little power for the susceptibility of these feelings, and less for their utterance. He displayed, however, just enough to prevent the betrayal of what he strove to conceal, though fearful that a very short time must make his painful secret known. He looked anxiously from the window of the room, having carefully fastened the doors of the dwelling; and while he was thus occupied, the Trappist slowly came forward from his father's little chamber. The spirit of piety seemed to beam from his face, which Melanie could now fearlessly look into, and acknowledge as that which in years of young endearment she had so often and so innocently gazed on. All the tumult of its late expression had died away in the

performance of his sacred functions; and he wore, for the moment, his own wonted look of pure and undisturbed devotion. But his eye fell upon the form of Nicholas, who still anxiously watched at the window, and he involuntarily started, and shrunk back—and when his brother turned round and stepped forward to embrace him, his face and forehead glowed deeply, as though his heart had sent up a rush of evidence to proclaim his self-accusal. But Nicholas had no suspicion that his brother's embrace was less cordial than his own, and Ernest himself was scarcely sensible of the check which an over-sensitive conscience gave to the impulse of natural affection.

The looks of all were now directed towards the bed within; and the invalid was seen placidly lying, his hands clasped on his breast, his eyes closed, an expression of profound contentment overspreading his face, and the motion of his lips alone giving proof that he still lived and prayed fervently. The anxious watchers, taking advantage of this tranquil and comparatively happy state, entered into a hurried interchange

of inquiry and explanation as to the events of the five years which had elapsed since they had last been together, in the midst of festivity, and feasting, and enjoyment to which there was but small exception on the wedding-day of Nicholas and Melanie.

A brief recital told Ernest of all the accumulated ills that had fallen on his family since that day, the auspicious opening of which was blasted by his immediate disappearance from his home and friends. The total ignorance of his fate had been ever since accompanied by successive misfortune; and ruin and disease had finally brought death within arms' length of the chief victim. Failure of crops, mortality among cattle, and a desolating flood, that swept the country for leagues around, were the main evils against which Martin Vandersteen was fated to contend. His superior knowledge of farming, his activity, and fortitude, made a long stand, but ill health bore him down; then it was that grief for the loss of his beloved child threw itself, unresisted, on his prostrate spirit, which gradually sunk with the worn-out frame it dwelt in; until that

hour when, by almost miraculous coincidence, the child returned, as if on Heaven's own mission, to smooth the track that led to his parent's grave.

But all this wretchedness was not without its consolations. A faithful and untiring wife watched by the sick bed, and ever threw herself to meet the assaults of ill luck, and soften their asperity ere they reached their mark. Melanie and her husband, who had, ever since their marriage, lived with her father, quitted the comforts of his residence in the valley at the foot of Scarpenberg, and following the fate of poor Vandersteen and his wife, accompanied them from refuge to refuge, when they were driven abroad by merciless creditors; and had for some weeks been with them in this lonely and wretched dwelling, situated on a farm of Joos Cooperslaugen, which, many leagues distant from their once happy home, and from his neighbourhood, promised a safe retreat against immediate pursuit.

And Joos Cooperslaugen himself, coarse, harsh, and violent as he was, proved, on this occasion, what redeeming virtues Nature can be-

stow on the sternest men. Of the many others of Vandersteen's *friends* (to use the parlance of the world), some stood aloof, feigned to have never received his application for relief, or found for refusal ample excuses to satisfy themselves. Others, slightly contributing to his wants, or coldly interfering with some claimant, rose on the poor advantage of having conferred a favour, and presumed, under cover of affected kindness, to censure, to sneer at, and insult, when they were only called on to do a service or be silent. The burthen of *such* obligations was too great for the sufferer's gratitude, and he at once cursed the ill-luck, and loathed the meanness which combined together against him. But Joos Cooperslaugen formed a fine contrast to this mass of every-day littleness. He came forward unsolicited; put his hand in his purse as far as it could in prudence go; met the creditors of his friend; soothed when he could not satisfy them; upheld the honour of the absent man against the insolent impeachment of his persecutors; defended his interests, sympathized with his feelings, and relieved his wants; and when he could

fairly do no more—when justice closed the hand that generosity would still have held open, he did not abandon the friend he could no longer serve, but continued to pour forth a fund of feeling, more precious than all the minted riches of the realm.

Ernest, for his part, had but a short tale to tell, and he curtailed it still, by suppressing all allusion to the motives of his flight from home. He only stated his entrance into the monastery; the long day of monotonous seclusion, of which months and years formed the divisions; his office of almoner; his last tour of collection; his presence at the procession at Furnes; and his chance meeting with Melanie's father. When he spoke of his employment as begging brother of his order, his mother shewed an attention more acute than during any other part of his short recital. She inquired if he carried the produce of his last collection on his person, and when he unhesitatingly answered that he did, and mentioned its amount, frankly but not boastingly, she repeated his words, with an emphasis which he did not rightly comprehend.

In a few minutes more the old woman went carefully into the sick room. Shutting herself in with her sorrowful employment, she resumed her place at the bedside, watching the countenance of the patient, who now calmly slept. Nicholas, on some pretext, left the hut, the door of which he closed after him, and Ernest was left alone with Melanie, both retaining the seats they had occupied during the explanatory recital before alluded to.

Placed thus alone, their sensations were widely different. Ernest, in the worldly and personal explanations that had just taken place, felt as if abandoned by the spirit of religion that had so lately rested upon him. He no longer knew the excitement which seemed to lift him above earth, when he knelt by his father's side, and spoke the words of what he felt to be inspiration, and which consequently was so *to him.* He was now, as it were, replunged into mere mortality; and the sensation excited by the presence of the innocent being beside him, was, fear *of* her, and *for* himself. A man even practised in the ways of the world, might have been embar-

rassed in such a situation; but to one like Ernest it was utterly overwhelming, and he was at once the sport of every conflicting feeling. Melanie, on the contrary, experienced a total relief from the apprehensions caused by Ernest's manner on their meeting at the door of the cottage. His avowal of his calling, the visible evidences of it, his whole bearing while in the actual discharge of its duties, threw a sacredness around him, which raised him, in her eyes, above the level of human weakness; and the conduct, which in its action so startled and surprised her, appeared now, in the weakness of reflection, accordant with the character of one superior to the common usages and general responsibility of men.

Melanie's was a mind as simple as it was pure. She possessed all the blind reverence given to their priests by the greater portion of her sex, in priest-ridden countries. But affection for Ernest mingling with respect for his office, her immediate feeling towards him was free, without becoming familiar. She held him in awe, but not in dread. During his long disappear-

ance she had shuddered, in common with all his friends, in the apprehension of death, or some terrible misfortune, having been his lot. When, therefore, she heard from his own lips the happy solution of the mystery in which he had shrouded himself, her delight was without bounds. She longed for the moment when she could freely converse with him on the subject of his flight from home, enter at large into the interchange of sentiments and feelings, and fully open her heart, under the guarantee and sanction of his holiness. That moment had now arrived; and Melanie, without reserve or scruple, availed herself of it.

"Oh, Ernest," said she, and she inclined towards him as she spoke, "what a day of mixed sensations is this! Oh, tell me, how is it that the heart can beat at the same time with such opposite feelings—with grief and joy—despair and delight! Our poor father, even in his hopeless state, joins I am sure in all this—then how must I feel it, dear Ernest! and what happiness to tell you what I feel—to speak to you as I

think—to communicate with you without restraint—and this for the first time in my life!"

"The *first* time, Melanie?" said Ernest, with an involuntary sigh, as his mind flew back to the day-spring of life, when he thought that Melanie's heart was as open to him as the sky above their heads, or the romantic paths of the valley in which they wandered together.

"Yes, yes, indeed it is the first time, Ernest; for, strange as it may seem, I never felt towards you as fearless and unrestrained as on this day. During our early intimacy, although you were but a boy, and I a heedless girl, there was a something, I knew not what, that made me shrink from you, even when I liked you most. But now that you are a priest and I a married woman, I possess a confidence that I never before knew; I feel as if called upon to confess to you—not crimes but feelings—and that I ought to avow to you what I would never before acknowledge to myself—how very much I loved you."

"That is a strong word, Melanie—loved me?"

"Oh, yes, better than all the world!"

"What! better than Nicholas? better than my brother?"

"Oh, yes, yes—I may surely say it now, without shame or sin. Had you not been a priest, or I been married, I never could have said it; but it seems to take a weight off my heart, and is it not right that *you* should know that heart truly at last?"

Her quickened respiration, and blushing cheeks, were eloquent tokens of her emotion, and the almost visible boundings of the heart, which she described, testified its freedom from the pressure that secrecy had laid upon it. But not satisfied with her own feeling of this, she took the hand of her silent, but deeply agitated companion, and placed it on her side.

"Feel my heart, Ernest—oh, feel it. Does it not bound lightly? Never, never have I known it to do since the last time we walked together up the side of Scarpenberg: the day that Nicholas asked me to marry him, and I ran out and told you, and you caught me in your arms and were so surprised. But it beat

then with fright, I think, and now it is with happiness."

The unresisting hand of the priest was placed over Melanie's heart, and both hand and heart perhaps stirred with reciprocal attraction; for the pressure of the one, and the throbbing of the other, seemed too electrical for the guileless pair, and they mutually recoiled, as if instinctive propriety had felt itself warned in each. But with the removal of Ernest's hand, Melanie was released from all restraint, for it was through the medium of the senses alone that her moral feelings had been momentarily affected. Her thoughts were pure and calm, and no words were uttered by Ernest to discolour or disturb them.

As for him, his priesthood had not the power to unman him, nor did his contact with holiness act a miracle on his mortality. He was innocent, but not insensible; and he possessed, in common with his species, feelings which fanaticism calls *sin*, but which are not so in themselves, for to become sin they must be indulged. When restrained they are component parts of

virtue, which is but a mixture of temptation and resistance. They are, however, for the wise purposes of nature inflicted on all men, and Ernest had his share. But they had hitherto lain dormant and concealed, and it was now to be proved whether in him they were meant to lead to good or evil. Melanie's words were fraught with powerful interest to the Trappist. He was scarcely aware of the act of placing his hand to feel the pulsation of her heart; but his turbulent sensations soon brought a consciousness at once painful and ecstatic.

"What words are you speaking, Melanie? and why do I listen to them? You recal scenes and revive feelings that should be forgotten."

"Forgotten, Ernest! Oh, no—they ought not, at least they *cannot*, be forgotten by *me*; and you do not look as if you wished to forget them. They were the happiest of my life, the only really happy ones till *now*, and now I am almost as happy as ever—more so, I believe;" and as she spoke, her arm lay gently upon Ernest's shoulder. He took her hand in his, and draw-

ing closer to her than before, he said, with an air of mild reproach,

"Well, well, then, Melanie, since you must be indulged, answer me truly the only question I will trust myself with. Why did you conceal your love from me? Why leave me to suppose you indifferent to the passion—what do I say! —to the friendship—the affection—the friendly affection you had inspired me with? Tell me why!"

"Indifferent! Indeed, Ernest, I never thought you cared more for me than in common regard you might. You never told me so. It was your place to speak. Wasn't it?"

"I never *spoke* it, indeed—I never told it in mere *words*, Melanie; but my thoughts must have made themselves known to you. My ardent affection—my respect—my despair at your acceptance of Nicholas—all this must have found utterance, though it had no tongue."

"So help me Heaven, Ernest, I was ignorant of it all! Had I ventured to believe it, could I have become the wife of another—of your own brother! Oh, no—the world could not ——"

"No more, no more, Melanie—another word and we are lost! Fool that I was—my cowardice has been my ruin! I dared not tell *you* what I felt—and your father, Melanie—I now reveal it for the first time—your father spurned me, scorned my proposal, and scoffed at what he called my boyish presumption. He had, in fact, given his sanction to my brother's offers—and *he* had made them without deigning to imagine the possibility of my intending the same. *Thus* it was that I lost the happiness which I now learn was within my reach; and when do I learn it? where? and from whom? Fool that I was—madman that I am—what thoughts am I indulging in—what language do I hold! Heaven pity and pardon me—I know not what I say or do. This is too much for me."

"Oh, Ernest, Ernest, speak not, look not so! This is not fitting you—have you not renounced all feelings that should lead to this? Forgive me, forgive me! Little did I dream of causing you an instant's pain. I am a weak, foolish girl still, as you left me years ago, Ernest; oh, then forgive me! I never dreamt of this—I knew

not that you ever had those feelings, and little thought that a priest could entertain them, and for his sister, too. I hoped to make you as happy as I was myself—but I am a criminal and unfortunate wretch! Oh, then, do forgive me!"

"Sweetest and most innocent," cried Ernest, in a tone of passionate tenderness, "cease to torture yourself. Be happy, be still happy in that innocence—and think no more of me. Too late I see what I have lost—too deeply feel the loss—too desperately deplore it! I *might* have been, then, all that my young affection sighed for! Alas, alas, Melanie, this is indeed misfortune! I have lost the only object that earth held of value, irretrievably lost it—and I abhor my craven heart that feared to take what Heaven meant to be its own. When I dared not dream of your loving me, I had power to combat my misery, for wounded pride was strong—when I saw you snatched from me for ever, the open bosom of religion seemed to invite me to repose; but now that all is revived anew—that I feel the fire burst forth which has been so long con-

cealed and consuming, what refuge is left for my despair? Religion will reject me—I violate even now her mandates—I am false to my duties—recreant to my oaths—rejected of my faith!—but *this*, this is supreme bliss; and, suffer as I may on earth, I will, I must take this foretaste of Heaven."

During this speech the Trappist held Melanie in his arms. His latter words were interrupted by the repeated and passionate kisses which he poured upon her. His lips were pressed to hers, and the pressure returned through floods of tears which had burst forth when she ceased to speak. The delirium of the moment caused every thing to be forgotten. Father, mother, danger, guilt, *self*, and its thousand associations, ceased to exist for Ernest and Melanie—and they stood in each other's embrace, until roused by the sound of rapid footsteps, close to the outer door, which was quickly burst open by Nicholas, whose whole frame shook with agitation. The pair so miraculously saved from a danger, the extent of which they knew not, in the instinctive impulse of self-preservation loos-

ened their enfolded arms, and sunk on the seats which, in their forgetfulness, they had quitted.

As soon as Nicholas entered, he securely bolted the door; and then, in half-suppressed and hurried tones, he said,

"Well, Melanie, the worst is at last arrived —my suspicions were too well founded! You were observed in the procession to-day by the harpies who have so long sought our retreat. In the house to which I carried you, some of our incautious words were overheard—we mentioned my father, and the wretches have never since lost sight of us. When I left you on the road and went towards Rousbrugge to seek the doctor again, I saw that I was watched. Now all is confirmed. Four bailiffs are entering the pasture, with a cart to convey our poor father to jail. What is to be done? Can we conceal him? To remove him would be his death."

Melanie could make no reply. She strove to speak, but her tongue clove to her palate. She would have risen, but her trembling limbs refused their office. She wept no more. The sources of speech and motion, and even of tears, seemed

at once and indissolvably congealed. Ernest reclined upon his chair, and covered his face with his hands. He appeared for a moment insensible to his brother's words; and Nicholas continued:

"Come, come, Melanie, rouse yourself! Ernest, there is no use now in giving way to grief: we must all exert ourselves. Come, come, give me your advice—what can we do to conceal our father? His life is at stake."

The emphasis laid upon the last words produced an immediate effect. Both Ernest and Melanie rose quickly, and, by a prompt transition of thought and feeling, their minds were wholly turned aside from all that had just absorbed them. The danger to their unfortunate parent produced a shock which overpowered every other emotion, crushing, for a while, even the giant force of passion. They sprang to the closet door, as if the first impulse was to fling themselves as a barrier before it; but Nicholas with more command of himself, and not unprepared for the occasion, looked for better means of security. His first thought was to remove

his father to the loft above, make his mother occupy the bed within, and thus lead the bailiffs to believe their prey had escaped. With this view he opened the door, and seeing that his father still lay calmly unconscious of the coming peril, he beckoned his mother from her place of watching. It was a delicate task to break the calamitous news to her; and Nicholas was not the best qualified for such a task, for he had been too long in contact with the rudeness of Joos Cooperslaugen, and had a too natural tendency to copy it. He, however, explained how matters stood, in the gentlest phrase which his nature and the urgency of the case allowed. The mother received the communication with a calmness that surprised her children. She opposed Nicholas's plan of removing her husband; and when he urged the necessity of that only chance of avoiding the misfortune which must otherwise befal them, she answered, with words and looks, the drift of which none of them understood,

"Be it so, my son: what is decreed must happen. I have been long prepared for the worst.

It has come at last, and if there is a change it must be for the better. Wait patiently, and fate will take its course. Heaven has foredoomed the events of this day, and I feel that relief is at hand. But to gather the fruit we must not break down the branch. Let Providence work out its own ways!"

Having uttered these words, she quietly sat down, looking towards the window, and piously crossing herself, and muttering a prayer when the lightning flashed, and the thunder pealed loudly above the cottage. But Nicholas persevered in his intention of active resistance. Moving into his father's little chamber, he was alarmed by the whispering of strange voices; and to his astonishment and grief he saw that two men had already entered by the window, while a third was following their steps. Nicholas, overlooking all consideration but those prompted by his natural boldness of heart, sprang on the intruders, and was immediately engaged in a desperate contest. The bailiffs, being satisfied as to the helplessness, and consequent security, of their prey, turned their whole force against their dar-

ing assailant; and soon overpowering him, they dragged him into the outer room, amidst all the confusion of his own imprecations, Melanie's screams, the groans of the disturbed sufferer, and the united prayers and entreaties of Ernest and his mother. While two of the fellows held Nicholas, fiercely struggling, on the ground, the third opened the door for the admission of one, who seemed, by his air of superior ruffianism, the leader of the party. He had remained outside in the safe charge of the horse and cart, while his satellites assailed the house. They were only armed with bludgeons, but their chief immediately produced a pistol, which he swore he would discharge at random into the group before him, if Nicholas made another effort at resistance. This threat, and his exhaustion, procured an obedience which danger to himself could not have gained; and the head bailiff produced and read aloud his warrant and authorities, for the seizure and lodgment in jail of Martin Vandersteen, at the suit of a petty creditor, for the sum of a few hundred florins—with all

the clogging technicalities that are meant, no doubt, to give dignity to such missives.

Ernest listened calmly to this performance, and then, avowing himself to be a priest, commenced a strain of religious remonstrance, and implored the forbearance of the official wretch, picturing his father's desperate and almost dying state, and dwelling on the impious violation of the Sabbath which was about to be committed. But the bailiff had no understanding for considerations of piety or pity. He scoffed at both; and pushing aside the Trappist, with irreverent force, exclaimed—

"Hark ye, mister priest, if you are one, which I very much doubt, I do not want your preaching. I came here for another purpose—I must have my man—his body must be mine—and dead or alive is all one to me. As to violating the Sabbath, I have a special order, and therefore there is no impiety in the case—the law is the law, and makes Sunday just as good a day as Saturday, or Monday either. So no further hindrance to the discharge of my duty, do ye see, or I'll have you all indicted for a rescue—

every one, men, women, or priests, or whatever the devil you may be ;—let me pass, I say, to seize the body."

Ernest, stunned and stupified by this ferocity, shrunk as the speaker passed by him ; and at the instant, his mother, who had anxiously listened to and watched him, flung herself upon him, and spoke—

"Oh, Ernest, Ernest, my child, can you further bear that this should go on ? Can you see your father dragged dying from his bed, with the means of saving him in your hands? You have money about you—more than enough for this demand—it is the money of charity, and how could charity be better applied than in saving your parent ? Heaven sent you here expressly provided with the means to avert this calamity. Believe it, my son—it must be so—do not hesitate.—Oh, Ernest, in the name of Heaven, listen to your mother !"

The moment that Ernest caught the meaning of his mother's first words, he felt a pang of terror and affliction. His hand instinctively grasped the secret pocket where the money

raised by his collection was secured. The blood suffered a revulsion in all parts of his frame, and he shook in every joint. None of his late emotions were equal to this, for no mixture of enjoyment now softened the shock. His mother's voice sounded like the summons of some fiend, tempting him to the commission of a sacrilege. His oaths of fidelity to his trust —the wants of his brethren—the sacredness of the funds which he held—the curse of the church on him who dared to misapply its rights—the eternal punishment of the perjured violator of its laws—all rose before him, in a confounding chaos of evil, past, present, and to come.

"Ernest, Ernest," cried his mother, "a minute more and it will be too late. Oh, God! they are lifting him from the bed.—Oh, Nicholas, Melanie, speak to this hard-hearted man! He is not my son—he is not my once-loved Ernest—yet speak to him—speak to him—for I can do no more!"

She tottered into the closet, where the bailiffs had actually commenced to raise their victim from the bed, and she caught them in her arms

with loud cries for mercy. Nicholas, still held on the ground, gnashed his teeth, and furiously uttered reproaches and imprecations; while Melanie threw herself on her knees, and seizing Ernest by the coat, exclaimed,

"Ernest, I call on you, in the name of Heaven! Oh, God! listen to your father's groans—see, they drag him out—listen again—Heaven and nature speak to you, and command you to prevent your parent's murder! Look at him, Ernest, I cannot—I cannot!"

At this moment the bailiff came forward, dragging the screaming wife, who clung to him with desperate strength, and embarrassed his movements. He carried high in his clasped arms the once robust form of Vandersteen, now dwindled to a skeleton figure. The victim, thus forced along, writhed and struggled, and a hideous expression of suffering glared from his face. At Melanie's exclamation, Ernest involuntarily cast his eyes to the door of the closet, and this spectacle met his gaze. Melanie still clung to him in an attitude of entreaty; and he sprang forward, and violently tore open his

secret pocket from the breast of his coat, produced the leathern purse which contained the whole sum of his collection, caught with one hand the arm of the bailiff, with the other poured the money on the table, and mechanically thrust back the empty purse into his pocket; then, without uttering a word, he snatched his father from the bailiff's arms, and lifting him in his own, he tottered back to the closet, and sank on the bed, still held in the fast embrace of *the corpse*—for the last convulsive struggle of Martin Vandersteen was this death-grasp clinging to the neck of his child.

The unconscious widow dropped on both knees, and with hysteric utterance, poured blessings and praises on the son, who had, as she thought, saved his father! Melanie stood with clasped hands, in silent emotion at the scene. Nicholas, at length released by the wretches to whom the sight of Ernest's money was a warrant of freedom, sprang lightly on his feet again; and raising his mother, and taking Melanie by the arm, they proceeded to follow Ernest to the closet, leaving the chief bailiff

counting the money, which his practised eye had at once acknowledged as more than enough to cover his claim.

Ernest laid his dismal burthen on the bed, gently disengaged himself from the close-locked arms which encircled his neck; and as he bent over the body, a vivid flash of lightning broke through the dusky twilight, and shewed him the fixed and death-struck features of what had been his father.

The look of death speaks a language of terrible veracity. It may not be counterfeited nor mistaken. Ernest read the truth with one glance. A convulsive shriek burst from him—and he sprang upwards, rushed past the group that blocked the entrance to the closet, bounded across the outer room, and through the open door, followed by a yell of laughter from the bailiffs, who were grouped round the table, reckoning their ill gotten booty.

Nicholas, still ignorant of the sad catastrophe, left his mother and wife to give their aid to his too tardily rescued father, and hurried after Ernest, shocked at his frantic air. He overtook

him just as he had cleared the plank that crossed the moat, and seizing him round the waist, he implored him in few words to return to the cottage. But Ernest wrenched himself from his brother's embrace, and in a voice of frantic rage, exclaimed,

"Back, back, hateful wretch! Leave me to the fate which you have brought upon me. I have robbed my brethren—murdered my father—ruined the peace of her I adored:—thanks to whom? I am covered with crime—Heaven is ready to blast me—hell yawns for me—listen to the laughing fiends! Who has made me what I am? Who thrusts himself between me and the bliss that was my own? Who follows me to the edge of the abyss? You, you! Leave me then to my despair."

"Ernest, for all our sakes, for your mother's, your poor father's, Melanie's ——"

"Monster! dare you to mock my misery!" Uttering these frantic words, Ernest raised his hand, and with a force that seemed more than his own, he struck a blow upon his brother's head that felled him to the earth. He then ran

headlong into the gloom, his desperate path lighted at times by the glaring flashes of the storm, and feeling as though the curse of Cain were seared on his throbbing brow.

Nicholas rose unhurt, and would have still pursued the poor fugitive, had he not been recalled to the cottage by the piercing screams of the women, which told him the tale of death.

CHAPTER VI.

At the very time that these distressing scenes were taking place, Joos Cooperslaugen, having been safely carried home by his valuable, though sometimes restive mare, was seated snugly before his own kitchen fire. But ere he betook himself to the refuge of his huge and well-stuffed elbow-chair, he saw that the partner of his rapid return from Huysenclaus was well cleaned, fed, and bedded in the stable which she exclusively occupied, apart from the coarser animals of the farm. Joos then proceeded to disencumber himself of his jack-boots, and his other riding habiliments. He next ordered Micha, his faithful maid, to place upon the table his pipe and

leaden tobacco-canister, his pint-measure drinking glass, and a pewter vessel containing a *litre*, filled from a cask of Madame Vermoot's brewing, at "the Tulip," in the village hard by. Thus provided, the honest farmer and overseer of the roads sat down to his lonely indulgence, listened to the storm that rioted through the glen, and drank a frothing bumper towards the better health of his old friend, at the very moment in which poor Vandersteen heaved his dying gasp!

Joos Cooperslaugen was a man of hope, who never despaired, set a bold face against fortune, and held ill-luck and the fever in scorn. In short, he had strong nerves, and no superabundance of bile. He had not, therefore, quite given up his friend, notwithstanding what he said to the Trappist. While he was by the sick man's bedside, and saw his suffering and exhaustion, he could not resist their influence, and he thought the case a bad one. But embedded in the seat and sides of his arm-chair, warmed by the fire (which in the damp valley was always in season,) dozed with strong ale,

and enveloped in tobacco-smoke, he took a different view of things. He began to grow sceptical as to the existence of what he had half believed in, and wondered how people could be so weak as to give way to illness, or create misfortunes, by imagining themselves unfortunate. So that by the time he shook the ashes out of his fourth pipe, and threw the dregs of his fourth glass into the fire, Joos Cooperslaugen had no memory for the evils of life; and sat in a quiet doze of self-contentment and good will towards all mankind.

His old *vrowe*, a strong-built, dumpy little woman, who had many a year's experience of her master's ways, was as regular as clockwork in her duties. She knew to a minute the time he took to disqualify the *litre;* and was never out in her reckoning as to the fit moment for replenishment. In the intervals of this duty she used to sit nodding on the rush-bottomed chair, which, to suit her stature, had suffered amputation in all its members, and rested on the stumps of its wooden legs in a corner of the chimney. Thus placed, she formed a sort of substantial

shadow to every movement of her master; and while appearing to sleep, she watched him from under her half-closed lids, and, by acute observation of his habits, was ready to anticipate every wish. She often surprised her master by this species of divination; for he, like many a wiser man, was ignorant of the treacherous way in which looks and motions anticipate words about to be spoken, and betray thoughts that are meant to be concealed. He never calculated that his forefinger being buried up to the second joint in the bowl of his pipe, told a tale of emptiness to Vrowe Micha, just as sure as if she had felt the void; nor was he aware of his invariable trick of smacking his lips, and wiping them with his hand, *before* he drank—thus reversing the natural and very cleanly custom of ale-drinkers in general. These, and many such signals, unconsciously telegraphed his wishes, which the ready *vrowe* replied to incontinent; and at the time alluded to, about a page ago, (if such reckoning be admissible,) when old Joos had despatched his fourth pipe and fourth pint, Micha started from her lowly seat, and shuffling

across to a corner press, took out the remnant of an Antwerp ham, a loaf of bread, some cheese and butter, and placed them on the table.

"Why, what the devil are you about, Micha?" said her master, rather gruffly, but with a look at the repast that spoke him "nothing loth."

"You are hungry, ar'n't you?" said she, giving him question for question.

"Yes, I am—but how did you know it? I did not tell you so?"

"No, but I *thought* you were," answered the *vrowe*. But she might have honestly said she *knew* it; for she could not misconstrue the farmer's constant habit of rubbing his broad and brawny palm over the surface of those regions where the appetetic action, in a healthy man, becomes pleasantly importunate about three times a-day.

"I'll tell you what, Micha," exclaimed Joos, mechanically putting his finger into his unfilled pipe, "this sort of knowledge of my thoughts, which you certainly have, somehow or another,

acquired, is convenient enough now and then; but it is, after all, a devil of a disappointment not to have occasion sometimes to say what one wants. There now, why do you put that canister close to my elbow? couldn't you wait till I asked you for it?"

"I thought you would like another pipe," said Micha, drily.

"Ay, and so did *I* think it, but I must not be thwarted in this way, I tell you," rejoined her master, smacking his tongue against his smoke-dried palate, and passing his hand across his parched lips. "What are you about there, Vrowe Micha? what are you doing in the beer closet?" continued he.

"Filling the litre," answered Micha.

"May the big rock of Rosenberg crush me to atoms, if I was not just going to bid you do it!" exclaimed Cooperslaugen, slapping the table with his hand, and rising up, in all the height and consequence of a big man in a passion. But Micha took no notice of that—at least she displayed none, but quietly sat down; and Joos finding no opposition in her imperturbability,

dropped into his chair, where his wrath exploded harmlessly, like a bomb-shell bursting in a morass.

"I tell you, Micha," grumbled he, "I don't like this officiousness—I hate a servant who forestalls her master's orders. It's quite enough to obey when you are commanded. To have the word taken out of one's mouth is downright insult—and I can bear any thing but that. What are you looking so glum for? Why do you sit there under the chimney, like a toad peeping out of a hole in the wall? Can't you be good tempered, and not drive me into a passion? What are you about, Micha, I say? Can I eat ham and cheese without a knife to cut them? Am I to root at them with my snout, like a hog in a trough? Why don't you give me a knife?"

"Because you did not ask for it."

"I say I did ask for it, Vrowe."

"I say you did not, Mynheer."

"I tell you, Micha, you had better not put me into a passion."

"I tell you, Mynheer Cooperslaugen, you

had better put yourself out of a passion. It is a shame for you to be always quarrelling this way, and vexing yourself when one does all that one can do to please you. And I'll tell you more, I don't deserve this from you. It's a poor return for all my services; and it's a bad heart that gives such bad temper."

A snuffling burst of tears cut short this reproach, but it was quite long enough to probe the master to the quick; for he could not deny that the beginning was true, and he was alarmed at the thought that the ending might be so as well. Besides the sight of tears always melted him; and Micha's copious tides never failed to wash away the landmarks of his resentment. On the present occasion, he was, as usual, the first to seek reconciliation. He spoke, but his voice fell a couple of octaves; and he stretched out his hand, which Micha, softened in her turn, seized and blubbered over.

"Come, Micha, forgive and forget;" cried he; "but I am sorry you think my heart so bad—you ought to know it."

"I do, I do know it well, for the best that

ever beat; and I am an ungrateful wretch, to say what I did. But I didn't *think* it—I didn't indeed—and you may forgive—a word or two—of hasty—oh, oh, oh!" and the imagination of her master completed poor Micha's sentence.

The quarrel was thus made up; but the vrowe continued for a long time her sobbing accompaniment to Joos' masticating operations: for her temper, though joined to a good disposition, was of that sullen and dogged kind which is sure to have its fling.

"Yes, I certainly was a little too hot," said Joos, not over articulately, through obstructions of ham and brown bread; "but you must make allowances for me, Micha. You know I may say, without any offence, that you are but a sorry substitute for my daughter. To be always rubbing against such a lump as you is enough to set one's temper an edge, like the teeth of a harrow striking against a frozen clod. I don't wish to flatter you—but you are a good girl, and have been so for a couple of dozen years to my knowledge. But you have no mind, Micha; you can't converse with me; and little as I have

to say to you, you stint me even in that. I don't like to sit with my pipe in my mouth, and drink beer without talking, like the Blackamoor's head over Madame Vermoot's shop door. I want society; and am not *myself*, since Melanie and her husband left me. She was such a good listener! and Nicholas always had a word for each of mine, no matter of what sort. But I am now forlorn, as it were. Since good Mr. Ruysten has taken up with those toad-eating Trappists, I have no one to drop in of an evening. I hate the parish priest, because—because—because he's a priest—and the exciseman hates me, because I keep the roads clear of his bribing cronies the smugglers. I have quarrelled with farmer Vranken, and farmer Cloots, and two or three more neighbours; and old Casasnooters, the notary, says his nerves can't bear my loud talking. All this is very unfortunate, Micha! It is enough to waste a man, mind and body! Just toss a couple of those black puddings into the frying pan—I don't much like this ham;" and he put aside his plate, with the bare bone he had so industriously unfleshed. "What

would I not give for a pleasant companion to pass an hour or two with me, and silence the growling of these thunder claps!"

"Hush, hush, Mynheer!" cried Micha, "don't you hear a voice outside? Some one is caught in the storm!"

"I think I do hear a faint call—yes—certainly—some traveller—though few venture this way after dark—who can it be? To the door, Micha—take the lamp—stop a moment—just let me cock my gun. Now, go on quickly—the cries are close by the house."

No sooner had Micha unlatched the door, than it was blown open by a gust of wind, and her lamp was at the same time extinguished. But the continued flashes of lightning amply illuminated the farm-yard, which was in front of the house, and brought out every object in vivid relief from the intervals of gloom which obscured them. Micha, however, wanted no light to enable her to steer through the obstructions of the place, every inch of which she knew so familiarly; and her heart being to the full as stout as her person, there was no impediment to her

stepping forth in search of the benighted person. She did so unhesitatingly, first calling close to her the two fierce dogs, which prowled about the yard, and, luckily for the traveller, were kept within its precincts, by their instinctive alarm at the storm. Joos Cooperslaugen stood at the door, with his gun cocked to guard against treachery, and hallooed repeatedly, in a key that seemed meant to challenge the very thunder. No answer was returned to these summonses; and Joos, being officially of a suspicious turn, called out to Micha to take heed; but Micha did not share his misgivings, or if she did, they were kept in the shade, by the outspreadings of the charity so deeply implanted in her heart. She heard her master's cautions, but did not heed them. She knew that a fellow-creature had called out for succour, and she felt irresistibly impelled to afford it, without arguing whether the appeal was true or false.

Micha made an ineffectual search in every corner of the farm-yard. She gave repeated invitations, in the kindest phrase which her Flemish jargon admitted, but no answer was

returned; and she then began to entertain fears for the safety of the poor being whose voice both she and her master had so positively heard. Neither the farmer or his vrowe believed in any one of the varieties of ghosts and goblins, which common credence attributed to the glen of Scarpenberg. Joos was one of those men, emphatically distinguished as "fearing neither man nor devil;" and Micha was a matter-of-fact lump of mortality, unlightened by the poetic leaven of superstition. They therefore persisted in supporting each other's conviction that it was a man's voice they had heard; and while Micha got soaked to the very skin, her master, ashamed to be outdone in exertion, prepared to share her labours; and having tied the flap of his hairy cap under his chin, and provided himself with the stable-lanthorn, he was in the act of wrapping himself in his cloak, when Micha discovered the object of her search, and saved both cloak and cap the necessity of repulsing the rain.

The sturdy wench had a heart so kind as to allow of compassion for pigs as well as men; and when she had convinced herself that nothing

of the last mentioned species was within the reach of relief, she turned her attention to the large company of the former, which grunted and squeaked most furiously in the square enclosure which they occupied close to the farm-yard wall.

"Poor things!" sighed Micha to herself, "they know my voice;" and as she looked over into the piggery, to speak a word of recollection, a broad flash of lightning displayed the whole community standing in a circle round the body of a man, who had apparently dropped among them from the top of the wall. This intruder appeared to Micha seriously hurt, or horribly frightened, for he coiled himself up like a hedge-hog, and resisted every intimation from the eight or ten snouts that simultaneously urged his removal. Micha's efforts were more effectual, for without a moment's delay she stooped down, and raised the body on her shoulder. A pair of stout arms in an instant encircled her neck, and the knees of her burthen instinctively fastened themselves against her ribs. Thus loaded, Micha waddled through the mud and manure of the yard, followed by the whole

population of the piggery, grunting forth their recognition of the hand that fed, and their resentment against the body that disturbed them.

Just as Joos Cooperslaugen stepped out of the house-door, Micha stepped in, and they came in contact rather abruptly, but not enough so to shake the new comer from his seat. He, however, opened his eyes at the shock; and the fierce and hair-fringed face of Joos, close to his own, was an object of legitimate alarm, sufficient to make him shut them again.

"Heaven have mercy upon me!" exclaimed he, as Micha disburthened herself, by shaking him off into her master's arm-chair.

"It has *had* mercy on you, my friend," said Joos, "in giving you a billet for such snug quarters. So cheer up; don't be afraid, you now have the laugh against the storm. Come, come, open your eyes and your mouth, and swallow this glass of real Scheidam, and look upon a man that no one need be frightened at—Joos Cooperslaugen of Scarpenberg, overseer of the roads, from Ypres to Poperingue, from

Rousbrugge to Steinwort—east and west, north and south—the same all round the compass—and pretty well known in these parts."

The stranger shook himself, and rubbed his eyes at this very reassuring speech, and swallowed unresistingly the proffered bumper of Geneva.

"That's right, my honest fellow," said Joos; "don't be afraid of it. Let your heart once get afloat in stuff like that, and nothing can sink it. Will you try another? You will?—ay, silence gives consent. But open your eyes, man—look at the glass, and be grateful to it. It was my father's before me."

The stranger could not resist the appeal. He looked for a moment or two at the family relic, which was one of those capacious dram glasses so common in Belgium, of thick chrystal, with a white spiral mark in the heart of its long shank, like a little snake worming its way up to the liquid at top. The stranger lost no time in useless observation, but instantly disposed of the contents with which Joos had liberally brimmed it.

"Well, well," said the latter, with a plaintive look; "I never take this glass in my hand without thinking of my poor father. But sorrow is as useless as it's dry—so here goes!" and he tossed off a bumper in his turn.

"Oh, Lord!" moaned the stranger, "if *my* poor father could but see his prodigal son, like an evil spirit in a herd of swine!"

Micha shortly explained this allusion to her master, understanding French and the Bible sufficiently to comprehend it. Joos burst into a fit of laughter, more suited to the stable than the kitchen. The stranger, however, did not take it ill-temperedly; but said, with a jocose leer at the string of black-pudding which Micha had laid upon the table,

"Laugh away, laugh away, most worshipful overseer, it's all fair; and I mean to take my revenge on the pigs, by an intestine attack on some of their progenitors. I confess a craving for one of these puddings, or a sausage, or any thing of that kind. Pray, my good girl, will you dress a few of these? You will join me, perhaps, Mynheer Cooperslaugen? I fear I

interrupted your supper; but there is plenty left for both of us—pray sit down."

It was Joos's turn to stare, and he did so broadly, as if he expected to see the brass oozing out of the stranger's forehead. So complete a recovery of self-possession, so quick an adaptation to circumstances, so much ease, and such undoubted impudence, had rarely been witnessed in the valley of Scarpenberg.

"Come, come, my worthy host," continued the stranger, "you see I make myself at home. That is the best way to prove my gratitude; and true hospitality wants no other return. You like a joke, I find, and no doubt you can *take* as well as *give*. That is a golden rule, believe me. A *generous* jester receives freely, and sparingly bestows. Pray sit down, Mynheer.—Give a chair to your master, vrowe. Here's to your health, Sir; your beer is indeed a fair match for your Geneva"—and the pint measure emptily echoed the smack of the drinker's lips.

"It is not bad, I believe," muttered Joos, hesitatingly, and quite confounded; and then (to

Micha's absolute consternation,) he calmly drew over a rush-bottomed chair, and placed himself at the table—resigning *his own* side of the fire, and *his own* two-armed, double-stuffed throne to the usurper, who dropped into those domestic dignities, with as much ease as though he had (like a mightier monarch) "found the crown in the mud," through which he had been struggling.

Some desultory conversation, to which the stranger contributed, profusely rather than generously, according to his own theory, now took place, while Micha smothered her wonderment in the smoke of her culinary proceedings. The black puddings were ravenously assailed, and the litre two or three times filled and emptied—Joos Cooperslaugen partaking of the repast in about the same proportion as he had shared in the conversation. For full twenty years Joos had never felt so uneasy. He had been until that moment the very despot of his fire-side circle. Every nod and wink had been a law; and his privileges of place and person were held as sacred as those of any other sove-

reign of the Fee-faw-fum dynasty in any country of the earth. He now appeared, on the contrary, a mere cipher in his own territory, having abdicated in favour of he did not know whom, and every thing went cross-ways. He found inconceivable difficulty in managing matters; his right hand seemed to be doing the work of his left; and he ate and drank, as it were, at the wrong side of his mouth. Micha was just as much embarrassed as her master; and she gazed, from her little chair, in silent bewilderment at his confusion.

But Joos felt amused, notwithstanding, by the fluent rhodomontade of his guest. He talked and eat with prodigious facility, and there was a quaintness in his discourse and manner, which rather tallied with the farmer's taste; so that as the glasses were successively filled and emptied, he began to be satisfied that he had actually beside him the "pleasant companion" he had been longing for about an hour before. There were none of the many subjects of the stranger's conversation on which he was more amusing than *himself*. He gave a most ludicrous account of

his wanderings through the valley — of his fears of the storm—his joy at discovering the lights of the house—his alarm at their sudden extinction, and at the terrible sounds of Joos and his handmaid's lingo, and of his prudent determination to lie close in the base security into which he tumbled by accident, after he succeeded in scaling the farm-yard wall. But to all this he gave a turn of drollery, which deprived the facts of the colouring of cowardice that a less embellished portraiture would have left on them; and he finished his personal narrative as follows:

"But I am somehow thinking, friend Cooperslaugen, that you yourself have been put a little out of sorts to-night. All men and all things are alike subject to mishaps, ecclesiastics and laymen, church and state. In the bustle of revolutions individuals and empires are both turned topsy-turvy—and if I have met the common fate, you have not quite escaped; for an overseer of the roads, deprived of his arm-chair, seems as much out of place as a priest in a pig-stye. Isn't that true?"

"A priest! why, what the devil do you mean by that?" asked Joos, that cabalistical word having banished all the other parts of the stranger's speech.

"Mean, my worthy host? why, nothing more than that I am a priest."

"You a priest!" uttered Joos, in a mixture of astonishment, and something very like alarm.

"Ay, that I am, and a man that no one need be frightened at. Brother Petrus Maria, of the order of La Trappe, perambulator of the roads from Amiens to Aire, from Arras to Abbeville—north and south, east and west, and quite as well known in Picardy as Joos Cooperslaugen in Flanders."

"Brother Petrus Maria, of the order of La Trappe!" exclaimed Joos, in his former tone.

"Ay, or if it pleases you better, Father Pierre, the Trappist, and begging brother to his convent."

"Begging brother!" vociferated Joos, starting from his seat, which he overturned in his alarm—"Thunder and furies! What can this

mean? Another of ye! Two in one day! This is too bad, and is not to be borne—it is a downright insult! What plot is hatching? What demon brought you here—and how did I suffer you to cross the threshold? Come, come, neighbour, this is a joke—I'll be cursed if you are a priest, or a beggar either—or, if you are, I forswear, from this blessed night, my hatred of both tribes, in honour of such a pleasant, bold-faced, impudent fellow. So down I sit again, though I have made a vow never to cross my legs under the same plank with monk or mendicant. Tell me truly who and what you are; and, be what you may, I trust to *your* absolution to wipe out my perjury."

With these words Joos resumed his seat; filled fresh bumpers for himself and Petrus Maria, and calmly listened while the latter related, that having quitted the diligence at Bailleul, to cross the valley on foot, he had missed his way, and got entangled in the thickets in search of the monastery on Catsberg, where he was going on a special mission from his

prior. This is a brief summary of a very circumlocutory recital, interlarded with dozens of Gasconisms, both in manner and matter; and interrupted by an abundance of hiccuping and hemming; and other consequences of what might be termed a *debauch.*

Joos seemed quite a metamorphosed man, under the influence of his companion. By the time they were both fairly fuddled, they seemed to have thoughts, feelings, glasses, and goblets all in common. They changed sides repeatedly, without knowing one from another; and there was not an object in the room that did not appear to turn round and round, even oftener than themselves. But Micha stood still, the steady pivot on which they made their various evolutions, and by her continued mediation their balance of power was preserved. She kept them on their feet, and finally put them into their respective beds. Joos Cooperslaugen's last waking thought was one of scepticism as to Micha's assurance that his head did not lie at the foot of the bed. Father Pierre chuckled even in

his sleep, at having bullied so great a bully, who was overcome by the main force of impudence—a consummation that never could have been effected by all the united modesty of mankind.

CHAPTER VII.

The farmer and the priest both felt as if they had but just closed their eyes, and as if their mouths had never been shut, when they were roused, at day-break, from that state of feverish lethargy which hard drinkers call sleep. "Water! water!" was the first word uttered by each, and the very call for it seemed to choke them. A couple of the carters, in a room adjoining their master's, started from their wholesome repose, with moist palates and clear heads, supposing the house to be on fire. Micha rushed into Father Pierre's chamber, with the same conviction; but both he and his host were discovered, sitting up in their beds, each with a

large brown pitcher (provided by the forethought of Micha) at his head, and pouring down torrents into their respective throats. Knowing only that they were abruptly disturbed, they made no effort to ascertain why or wherefore; and they prepared to resume their broken slumbers with unconscious mutterings of dissatisfaction. But the loud knockings against the house door, and the calls upon Joos Cooperslaugen by name, were not to be slept through. Father Pierre, as soon as he could collect reason enough to comprehend any thing, fancied that robbers were breaking in, hid his face under the bed-clothes, and instantly became sober from the effect of fear. Joos Cooperslaugen recovered *his* senses by the force of feeling. Recognizing, with a sudden conviction, the voice of his son-in-law Nicholas, he sprang out of bed into the middle of the floor, and as if a stream of light had burst upon his mind, and imparted to it the clearness of a purer source, he clasped his hands together, and with fixed looks and painful energy, exclaimed—

"Martin Vandersteen is dead!"

Nicholas, admitted into the house by the servants, mounted quickly to their master's room, and, as he entered, he saw the giant figure of Joos standing before him, in an attitude and air of unwonted despondency. Nicholas, not imagining that any sinister presentiment could have penetrated his father-in-law's sternness of mind, supposed that some personal mishap must have caused his evident sorrow.

"Why, how now, Mr. Cooperslaugen," said he, laying his hand on that of Joos, "what is the cause of this? What has happened?"

"What has happened!" repeated Joos, with a firm, but mournful tone, and a compressed expression of features which announced an internal struggle; "what has happened, Nicholas! Is it for you to ask that? Does the bearer of ill-news need to be told his own story? Or is it that you think to prepare me for it—to break it to me? But I hope you know me too well, Nicholas. Joos Cooperslaugen is no child, nor chicken-hearted. The old elm in the avenue there, may be bent by a storm-gust, but does not need a zephyr to tell what is coming. Just so

with Joos Cooperslaugen. I am always ready for the blast, and I feel that it is come *now*, without any one to say so. I am not a bit superstitious, I believe, but I can calculate a little, though no great scholar; and I well know that one thing only could have brought you here, through such a night as the last. Women may be left to watch by a *corpse*, but a son could not have quitted a father, struggling with death. Martin Vandersteen is dead! You have lost a good father, Nicholas, and I the best of friends. He is not to be replaced either ways. But we may do much for each other, my boy. Be you always *my* friend, and I will, please God! be a father to you. Let us bear this blow like men, Nicholas. What are you whimpering about? It is for your poor mother and Melanie to cry, but you and I—two men—aye, and brave ones, though I say it—we should not *shew* a weakness, any how, let us *feel* what we may."

And with this philosophical axiom he dashed away the *evidences* from his eyes, and strove to deceive Nicholas, as well as himself, by hoarse

and half-articulated calls to Micha to prepare some dry clothes and other refreshments for her young master. While she so employed herself, Joos as quickly completed his rustic toilette, Nicholas briefly detailing the events of the preceding night, which had made the cottage at Huysenclaus so sorrowful a contrast to the residence of its owner.

Joos listened with deep attention to the circumstances affecting the death of his friend, and with unbounded astonishment to all that related to Ernest. He fully entered into Nicholas's anxiety as to his brother, of whom he was now in search, having, as Joos justly supposed, left the duties to the dead to the care of his grief-stricken wife and mother.

The most likely place of discovering Ernest appeared to be his monastery—at least so calculated Joos and Nicholas; and there they resolved on going immediately. The latter having changed some parts of his dress, from his homely wardrobe, urged an instant setting out, and Joos declared his readiness, but suddenly exclaimed, in answer to a whisper from Micha,

"The devil! That's very true—I had quite forgotten—this sad news drove him utterly out of my head. I wish he was well out of the house—he brought nothing but bad luck into it. Call him up, Micha, and tell him I am ready to shew him the road to the monastery. Little did I think I should ever pay it a visit, or have one of its hypocritical tribe within my doors! Wait a minute or two, Nicholas. One of your unfortunate brother's fraternity is here—the very fellow, perhaps, that kidnapped poor Ernest five years ago. Let us wait for him, he is going to Catsberg as well as ourselves; and, to tell you the truth, I don't like to leave him in the house behind me. Nothing has been in its own place since he came; and there is no knowing what might stick to him, should he go off unwatched. He calls himself a beggar, and seems just such a one as would never be at a loss to find a wallet, and wherewithal to fill it. He says he is a priest. That may be—but if so, the breed is well crossed since the revolution—he is the first I have sat with since. But

here he comes—he must have been ready before Micha summoned him."

And so, in fact, he had been; for having cautiously uncovered one of his ears, while the rest of his person lay wrapped in the counterpane, he had heard a considerable part of Nicholas's communication to Joos. Thus satisfied of his safety from the fancied danger, he quickly dressed, and came down stairs as soon as summoned, thinking to hide the memory of his excess behind an *unblushing* face, which, however, turned truth's evidence, by its scorched and bloated appearance. He exchanged salutation with his host, wearing an air of day-light propriety; and darting a glance at Nicholas from eyes of liquid flame, he gave his morning benediction to both, bowing down his head with a mock humility, worthy of any that ever bent to the pressure of the mitre which its tongue had just refused.

Under these ill-omened auspices Joos and Nicholas set out, accompanied by him who was fitter to be their secular follower than their spiritual guide. They had scarcely quitted the

farm, and passed by the avenue to the narrow road leading through the glen, when they found their passage obstructed. One of the oaks that skirted it, but which had been shivered by the lightning, lay scattered across the way. The rivulets which ran down the acclivities at each side were swoln by the rain; and, overflowing their channels, they carried down clay, stones, and shrubs, which, cementing the prostrate branches, made at that particular spot a temporary lake of considerable extent. The wooded side of Catsberg was opposite; and while Joos and Nicholas held counsel together, as to the better direction for seeking a passage, their companion, whose thirsty glances seemed quenching themselves in the pool, perceived, nearly at the farther side, the body of a man, partly in the water, and partly entangled in the branches. He communicated his discovery to the others, who instantly ran with him close to the spot; and all three, casting eager looks upon the face which lay clearly exposed, exclaimed together,

"Placidus!"

"Ernest Vandersteen!"

"My brother!"

They were all right in their epithets—but the hapless being recognised, replied not to their joint exclamations. Without another word they all stepped into the water; and wading through it nearly breast high, they reached the body, which they immediately lifted to the bank beyond.

Joos Cooperslaugen feeling the pale face, and taking up one of the wet cold hands in his, exclaimed, "Poor fellow, he is stone dead!"

Petrus Maria, pulling forth the empty purse from the tattered coat, cried out, "Unfortunate Placidus, he has been robbed and murdered!"

Nicholas, in the instinct of affection, tore open the vestments, and placed his hand upon his brother's heart—"He lives—he lives! His heart still beats! He may yet be restored—to the monastery, to the monastery!"

Such were the exclamations of Nicholas, and as he spoke he lifted the body in his arms. He soon gained the summit of Catsberg, occasionally relieved from his pitiable burthen by his strong-limbed companions, who readily joined in what

they, nevertheless, considered a hopeless exertion. The monastery was now close to them, and Petrus Maria advanced to the little door of entrance to the garden. At his loud signal it was instantly opened, and the prior, with some of the brotherhood, hurried out, surprised at the unusually early visit which the bell so loudly announced.

The prior and his followers were struck with horror at Petrus Maria's hurried expression of his own worst fears, and at the fatal confirmation which seemed stamped on Ernest's corpse-like face. With the utmost promptness the body was conveyed into the house, and the best means were resorted to for restoring suspended animation, with an energy, steadiness, and skill, that gave every possible chance for success. In a short time those efforts were rewarded. All the symptoms of life appeared—but no evidence of returning reason became visible. A confused mixture of opinions and conjectures was put forward, as to the best method for leading back the mind to sensibility. Cooperslaugen, Nicholas, and Petrus Maria, had each his separate

theory; but the prior took upon himself the direction of the subject; and the means he employed turned out as efficacious as they appeared singular.

He ordered the freely-breathing but motionless body to be gently carried to the open air, and thence into the chapel, where the brethren were assembling for the morning service. Stretched on a mattrass in the centre of the aisle, and close to the altar steps—a line of his brother monks at each side, and he so placed that his opening glances would rest upon the most sacred objects of a pious Catholic's belief—lay the still senseless form of Ernest, awaiting the process of that new creation which was to raise him up again, in all the power and spirit of mortal life.

Nicholas and his father-in-law watched, from the gallery above, the progress of the strange and solemn scene. They looked down on the monks, with bare heads and bended bodies; on the prior prepared for officiating at the plainly decorated altar; on Ernest's outstretched figure and pallid countenance; and this simple combi-

nation of human forms sent a feeling of solemnity through the rough and irreverent observers that the proudest display of sectarian splendours would have failed to excite. Both Joos and Nicholas were affected, in a manner unknown to them before; and when the deep chaunting of the matin service commenced, they involuntarily sunk on their knees, and joined in the prayers which the brotherhood addressed to Heaven for the restoration to mental life and light of him who absorbed the thoughts of all.

During the progress of the ceremony the measures taken by the prior were amply justified. The tollings of the bell, the low-murmured sounds of the opening service, and then the swellings of the chorused harmonies had acted on the mind that gradually tended towards resuscitation. The new development of its faculties was witnessed with joy by the little congregation, each individual feeling his separate share in the result which seemed to flow from the united supplications of all.

The first proof of Ernest's awakened sensibility to the scene, were the spasmodic movements

of lips and eyelids, and the rapid clenching and opening of the hands, as if the senses were making simultaneous efforts at expression. Flushings came across the face, the breast heaved, low sighs burst from it, and finally a rush of tears seemed to remove the last obstruction to returning reason. Then memory began to work. A sudden start—a rapid change of posture—the body raised on one knee—the hand passed across the brow—an astonished glance sent round—a momentary gaze upon the priest—and an instant relapse into insensibility—these were the signs that spoke the mind's revival, and the first impressions by which it was affected.

The service was now ended, and the prior motioned to the brethren to retire. He instantly followed them; and proceeding to the gallery, with a few of the monks, he watched, in conjunction with Nicholas and Joos, the further display of Ernest's recovery. He had not long to wait. The momentary relapse into exhaustion was now past. Ernest again raised himself up, and after a brief space, which appeared occupied in rallying his scattered thoughts, he rose upon

his feet; and then, with uplifted hands, sunk in the attitude of prayer, and finally prostrated himself upon the altar steps. The fervent solemnity of his manner spoke a full conviction of his situation; and it was further confirmed by his soon quitting his kneeling posture, and, with clasped hands and downcast looks, taking the direct passage to his own cell. No obstruction was offered to his way; and he was observed to enter silently, and sink on his bed, as if his strength had failed at the moment he reached that haven of refuge from the world.

It was thus that the considerate good sense of the prior had smoothed for the poor sufferer the path of recovery; and by letting him revive, as it were, within the very bosom of religion, allaying the anguish of recollections which could not be suppressed. The broken details which Nicholas gave of his father's death, and the unexplained fact of Ernest's loss of the money on his tour, were causes enough for the prior's precautions, and for the channel into which he so successfully strove to turn his awakening thoughts. Had the prior known *all* the combining feelings

that drove Ernest out into the storm, and sent him wandering on, till the rain and wind and fatigue had beaten him down, to be saved almost by miracle from death, he had probably abandoned in despair the task of ministering to a mind so agonized.

It would be fruitless to trace the labyrinth of conjecture, as to Ernest's sensations while he lay in his solitude. His mind must have reproduced, in its own despite, many of the scenes and much of the feelings he had so lately acted in and suffered. But religious devotion had regained its wonted ascendancy, and happily for him, its impression was now even stronger than before. The past events, mighty as had been their effect, were totally overpowered by the inspiration which seemed newly poured into him; and he felt as though he had wandered in a gloomy dream, and awoke in the sunshine of Heaven. His only anxiety was to throw off the load which secrecy laid on his heart, to avow the enormities of which he was self-accused and self-convicted; and to bury in the dreariest seclusion and severest penitence the very memory of the world,

which he now finally and for ever renounced. Such was the progress of recovered thought in the mind of the young Trappist; and while it powerfully worked its way in heart and brain, the prior, Nicholas, and Joos conversed together on Ernest's past and present state; Petrus Maria attending on their conference, in right of the share he had had in rescuing him from death.

The prior anxiously entered into particulars relating to the object of his solicitude. His inquiries were not confined to the mere circumstances of his immediate situation and its causes, but went back into the details of his early life, ere he had joined the fraternity. On these points Joos Cooperslaugen felt himself quite competent to speak; and he entered into a fluent, and somewhat boisterous detail, which need not be repeated here. It wound up by a sort of spoken appendix, to the following effect:

"So you see he was always inclined to laziness, and superstition, and religion; and no wonder (saving respect) that he took up with you and your like. He never worked at the

farm, like Nicholas, there; he employed himself doing nothing; he never took the plough in his hand, nor attended markets, nor studied any thing worth while—nothing but books, and trash of that kind. God knows what put matrimony into his head; but when he asked me for Melanie, I told him he was fitter for a priest, or an opera singer, than a husband to a pretty girl—and that, perhaps, gave him the notion of joining company with you. And here you have him now again, and I hope you'll keep him fast. For myself, I am now more than ever rejoiced at the part I took. I see what good luck my daughter had, in getting such a fine rough-handed fellow as Nicholas, instead of a whimpering booby like Ernest, who is fit for nothing better than fasting and praying, starving and begging, wasting himself, and worrying Heaven. So now, Mr. Prior, I wish you good bye; the morning is wearing fast; and Nicholas and I must ride some leagues, to bury the poor father of this good-for-nothing son; and I wish you joy of your bargain!"

During this communication of facts and

opinions, to which the prior listened with calm attention, Petrus Maria had beckoned Nicholas aside. He had learned enough, from the broken statements of the latter, to take it for granted that Ernest had somehow made away with the money he had gathered; and having a tender conscience for the peccadillos of others, whatever might be its severity in relation to his own, he whispered into Nicholas's ear,

"Now take a friend's advice, Mr. Nicholas, and when you speak to the prior again, say nothing as to how the money disappeared. What so likely as that poor Brother Placidus was robbed? Didn't I think so when I found him in the puddle, with his empty purse in his pocket? Where's the use of denying that? Will it bring the guelders back? Then leave things just as they are—a silent tongue is a safe witness—if it explains no fact, it tells no lie. Leave the money matter all to me. I will state the fact of the empty purse and the torn pocket, and when Brother Placidus is able to see me, I will give him a lesson as to what he should say, and what he should *not* say—a point of much

more importance, and equally great in the ways of the world as in a Trappist's cell. So, hush! not a word about florins or stuyvers! You know, I suppose, that the worst crime against the church is making away with its money. It is the most heinous of heinous sins, if it be found out; and should excommunication follow the discovery, there is no chance for the culprit, here or hereafter, for Heaven *must* ratify the sentence that sends him to hell. So, St. Peter take care of you, and bless you, and keep your tongue from wagging!"

Nicholas felt no disposition to injure his brother in this world or the next, and he observed the hint thus given him. Agreeing with the prior, that Ernest should be left for some time free from all intrusion, he and Joos took leave of the monastery and its inmates; and, first returning home, they provided themselves with horses, and proceeded on their painful duty to Huysenclaus' farm.

As soon as they had left the monastery, Petrus Maria proceeded to communicate the object of his mission to the prior. It consisted

merely of some directions for domestic discipline, which strict secresy and their probable insignificance put beyond my reach, and left me no inclination to strain after. Petrus Maria then taking plenary advantage of his dispensation, paid a visit to the cook, and conscientiously overhauled the private stores of the larder. I cannot say exactly what he found there; but it may be safely inferred there was not much of such materials as he rejoiced in, for he was soon seen trudging down the hill, and entering Madame Vermoot's hospitable door. A thick vapour curling up from the chimney gave an almost immediate announcement of his visit and its object, but we may safely suppose that, begin as it might, it did not *end* in smoke.

The prior, in the mean time, visited Ernest in his cell. Their conference was a long one, but its particulars did not transpire. It may easily be believed that the confession was both ample and honest; and that Petrus Maria's cunning, and the caution of Nicholas, were rendered nugatory by the conscientious revelations of the penitent. The self-inflicted penance was a vow

of perpetual silence which no circumstance was ever to absolve; an attendance for life on every religious rite observed in the monastery; a total seclusion from all lay intercourse, without exception; an abstinence from all but one scanty meal a day until nature might sink under the privation; and the public avowal of his story, as a warning to all who might follow him in the perilous temptations of a "Begging Brother's" career.

These hard conditions, towards a reconciliation with himself, and Heaven's forgiveness, had been for a long time rigidly observed. The victim to a too fervid imagination and over excited mind, bore up, as best he could, against a punishment, outrageously violent in comparison with his errors, and murderous in its effect upon his health. The brilliant but consuming meteor of fanaticism shone on his cheerless doom; but it was to him the light of Heaven itself. In this delusion he was happy—happy in despite of all he had suffered in reality, and in remembrance again endured. For whatever he had known of pleasure was not revived in

recollection; but long-buried feelings of misery seemed to start from their tombs, and haunted him still. These formed the earthly purgatory from which he was at length set free, by the force of that exalted and exaggerated fervour, which raises the fanatic to a sphere of transport, that exists for him alone.

Thus the young Trappist finished his worldly course; for the frail link which held him still to life could scarcely be called a tenure of the world. Thus did I see him, and mark him, as I have faintly sketched in the introduction to his story. Consumption had too plainly settled in his frame, which was at once supported and worn down by the intenseness of his devotion.

A long winter has passed since then! I know not what results it may have brought, or what resistance to its wasting damps and colds was offered by Ernest's broken constitution. In all human probability he has ere now sunk into that remote and simple grave, which he had claimed from his superior's indulgence, on the little eminence that overhung the vale of Scarpenberg. And, even now, I can fancy the gentle form of

Melanie gazing upwards on the spot, and putting forth prayers for the repose of his soul, whom she had loved so well, without sin, and mourned so deeply, without repentance.

Note.—It was in the year 1650, that one Mannaert, a soldier in the regiment of Colonel Vauboquet, at the time in garrison at Furnes, urged by want of money and the bad advice of a comrade called Mathurin Le Jeusne, committed an act of sacrilege, that inspired a horror almost as great as did the famous outrage of Jonathas, the Jew of Louvain, three hundred years before, which gave rise to the *miracle* of the bleeding Host, and the jubilee by which it is so splendidly celebrated at Brussels every fifty years.

The crime in question consisted in the soldier Mannaert having approached the altar, in the feigned humility of a communicant, and having immediately removed the consecrated wafer from his mouth, wrapped it in a pocket-handerchief,

and carried it safely and secretly to his quarters. There, in conjunction with the instigator of his sacrilege, he proceeded to burn the sacred Host, hoping, by some preparation of the ashes, of which we have not the recipe on record, he might succeed in rendering his person invulnerable, and gain an unlimited command over the wealth of the world. But scarcely had he consummated the unholy deed, than, conscience-struck, and nearly frantic with remorse, the infatuated man rushed from the scene of his impiety, fled, like a maniac, through the town, and at length, exhausted and worn out by fatigue and agitation, he was arrested: when, perhaps unconscious of the self-destroying effect of his avowal, he amply acknowledged his crime. Mercy, the most godlike attribute of Power, slept deeply in those days; nor was she awakened by the sounding voice of Bigotry to stretch her protecting arm over the doomed offender. On the Ash-Wednesday following the commission of his crime, (the interval being spent no doubt in the tortures of respentance and *the question*) he was led to the various corners of the town, amidst the

execrations of the people, strangled by the common executioner, and his body, with that of his associate in daring ignorance, (then construed wilful guilt.) burned in the market-place, and the anathematized ashes scattered to the winds.

To appease the divine wrath, and give a warning lesson to posterity, the procession of the Passion was instituted; and, to the disgrace of human reason and the age we live in, it is not yet abolished.

THE END.

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